

Immune-mediated Hemolytic Anemia (IMHA)

What is it?

An autoimmune disease. The dog's immune system attacks the dog's red blood cells, resulting in anemia.

What causes it?

IMHA (Primary) is diagnosed when a dog's immune system starts to produce antibodies that attack the red blood cells. This is also referred to as idiopathic (of unknown origin) IMHA. 60-75% of IMHA diagnoses fall into this category.

Secondary IMHA is diagnosed when an underlying disease causes changes to red blood cells. The immune system no longer recognizes the red blood cells and begins to attack them.

Secondary IMHA can result from underlying cancer, toxins, snake bites, stings or other allergic reactions, drug reactions and parasites of the blood.



Signs & Symptoms

Symptoms can include (but are not limited to) acting tired or lethargic, weight loss and/or loss of appetite, pale gums, black or tarry stool, and increased heart rate.

IMHA affects the whole body, exact symptoms can vary widely by individual, as can symptom severity. Dogs in early stages of IMHA may even be asymptomatic.

Prognosis/Prevention:

IMHA is a serious, life threatening condition. Prognosis for a dog with IMHA is dependent on how early the disease was diagnosed, any possible underlying cause, and overall health. There is no prevention, only early detection. IMHA is one of the most expensive diseases to diagnose and treat, running well into the thousands. Although you cannot prevent the disease, you can make sure you are prepared by insuring your pet early in life and having savings or a line of credit free for emergencies.

More Information:

<http://scvsec.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Immune-Mediated-Hemolytic-Anemia-Canine.pdf>

Testing & Treatment

How is it diagnosed?

IMHA diagnosis is made on basis of excluding other possible ailments and bloodwork to check if the dog is anemic. This is not a single diagnostic test, many tests may be ordered before a diagnosis is made.

Secondary IMHA requires diagnosis and treatment of the underlying issue.

How is it treated?

Care for a dog diagnosed with IMHA varies depending on how advanced the disease is. 24 hour intensive care and hospitalization may be necessary to stabilize the dog, and your vet may recommend a specialist.

Treatment may include blood transfusions, immunosuppressive medications, steroids, and supportive care.

This information is not meant to be a substitute for veterinary care.

Always follow the instructions provided by your veterinarian.

*Newfoundland Dog Health Fact Sheet produced by the NCA Health & Longevity Committee
written by Terri Lewin, copyright Newfoundland Club of America 2019*