

My dog has Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM)

Southern Counties Veterinary Specialists

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Dilated cardiomyopathy usually affects large breed dogs. Certain breeds (e.g. Doberman Pinschers, Boxer dogs, Dalmations, Great Danes, Newfoundlands) are particularly predisposed to this disease but the disease is seen in a large number of breeds.

How do I know if my dog has DCM?

Sometimes, a heart murmur or an irregular heart beat (arrhythmia) can be noted during routine examination and prompts referral for a heart ultrasound. However, DCM often remains undiagnosed until clinical signs such as collapse, exercise intolerance, cough or breathing difficulties develop. In predisposed breeds, screening tests (ultrasound, 24h ECG recording) are often recommended to identify the disease early, particularly in breeds where there is a risk of sudden death.

How dangerous is it?

Sadly DCM is a very serious disease. In general, there are two major risks for dogs with DCM: some dogs will develop congestive heart failure, resulting in life threatening breathing problems; in others, heart rhythm abnormalities are the main problem and affected dogs can sometimes drop dead without any earlier warning signs.

What treatment is needed?

Treatment is usually tailored to suit the affected dog and his/her particular problems. Dogs with DCM should be treated with an ACE-inhibitor which has been shown to prolong the survival time. If serious arrhythmias are found, then your dog may require anti-arrhythmia medication to reduce the risk of collapsing episodes and sudden death. In progressed cases with heart failure, very intense treatment with multiple heart medications is usually necessary.

How long will my dog live after DCM is diagnosed?

This is extremely variable, varying from a few weeks to a number of years. There are many factors which influence the survival time. Stage of the disease, breed, complications such as heart rhythm abnormalities and specific findings on heart ultrasound can give an idea what you can expect. Veterinary cardiologists are very experienced at managing DCM in dogs and can often achieve very good results even in cases with advanced disease.

How often do I need to bring my dog to the vet for re-examination?

Dogs with DCM which has been identified before signs develop are often stable for longer periods of time and are usually checked every 3-6 months. In more advanced disease, if arrhythmia is found, or if clinical signs (cough, breathlessness, exercise intolerance, collapse) have developed, then more frequent examinations, typically every 1-3 months are often required to make sure that your dog is getting appropriate medication and is kept as safe as possible.

Information about SCVS

We provide cardiology referral services for veterinary practices in much the same way that a medical consultant would for general practitioner (GP) practices in the field of human medicine. We work closely with your vet, using our specialist knowledge, experience and equipment to help provide the best possible treatment for your pet.

We provide a 24/7 cardiology referral service to vets across Southern England, the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands.

We are aware that referral services can be expensive, however there are usually lots of options for managing your pet's particular problem. You can be sure we will do our best to find the best and most cost effective solution for you and your animal.