

The ITP Support Association Platelet Reprint Series



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Title: **Canine ITP**

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Introduction

*The ITP Support Association had become aware that owners of dogs with ITP had been searching the internet desperately seeking information. Professor Herrtage and his team from The Queen's Veterinary School Hospital at the University of Cambridge kindly wrote an article for us on Canine ITP which along with photographic examples of dog ITP samples, can be found on the Canine ITP page of the Association's website <http://www.itpsupport.org.uk/itpindogs.htm>. The edited extracts below were included in the December 2013 edition of *The Platelet* as we thought the topic may be of general interest to readers.*

Causes and Diagnostic Tests

Depending on the dog's previous medical history the vet may choose to look for an underlying cause of the thrombocytopenia. ITP can be caused by various infections, including viral and bacterial infections. The most important type of infection to cause thrombocytopenia in the UK is Ehrlichia, which is spread by ticks, and the vet will be able to test for this if infection is a possibility. Some drug treatments, particularly antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs, can cause thrombocytopenia.

It is important for the owner to inform the vet if the dog has travelled outside the UK, as various infections that are not native to the UK can cause thrombocytopenia.

People often worry that the ITP has been triggered by recent vaccination, as this link has been established in humans (although is exceedingly rare). In dogs it has not been proven that any vaccination causes ITP, and if it does occur it is also likely to be a rare event. It is very important for owners to remember that many of the diseases the dog is vaccinated against are far more dangerous and common than the rare side effects associated with vaccination.

Treatment

Doses of prednisolone vary markedly between patients but high doses are generally used at the beginning of the treatment. Side effects are by far less frequent than in human patients, allowing some canine patients to be treated only with prednisolone for a prolonged period.

If prednisolone alone does not control the clinical signs or if side effects are noticed, the vet may also prescribe other immunosuppressive drugs (e.g. azathioprine, cyclosporine). If the platelet level is critically low and bleeding had occurred, the vet may suggest a transfusion of fresh canine blood or other blood components.

A surgery to remove the spleen has been advocated in severe cases of ITP which failed to respond to medical treatment. We rarely recommend this surgery in our hospital but this must be discussed with the dog's own veterinarian.

If ITP is severe enough, hospitalisation in a referral hospital may be needed. In a referral hospital access to unusual medications, including human medication may be facilitated (e.g. intravenous human immunoglobulin, vincristine, mycophenolate mofetil).

Prevalence

In a study of dogs in the USA, ITP was the cause of 0.26% of hospital admissions. Any breed, sex or age of dog can be affected by ITP. It seems to be more common in middle aged, female dogs, particularly Cocker Spaniels, Old English Sheepdogs, Miniature and Toy Poodles.