

**Talk to us about
how you can help**

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Striving to conquer IMHA - a devastating canine disease



How you can help

Taking on the IMHA challenge

What is IMHA?

Immune-mediated haemolytic anaemia (IMHA) is an important autoimmune disease of dogs that causes severe anaemia when the immune system attacks and destroys normal red blood cells. It is the most common autoimmune disease in dogs across Europe and North America. Generally, it is more common in younger and middle age dogs but it can also occur in elderly dogs. This is why our work to combat this disease is so vital.

High mortality rate

Despite treatment, up to half of affected dogs unfortunately still do not survive the disease. Many others experience considerable distress.

Susceptible breeds

Although the cause of the disease is currently unknown - it appears to be partially related to genetic background. Some breeds have a higher rate of diagnoses than others. The most susceptible breeds appear to be:

- Cocker spaniels
- English springer spaniels
- Maltese terriers



The onset of the disease is often very sudden - ‘yesterday everything was fine’, and next day the dog may be fighting for its life.

Typical signs



- pale or yellow gums
- extreme weakness and lethargy
- loss of appetite
- jaundice (yellow discolouration) of whites of the eyes
- discolouration of urine (becomes red or dark brown)

Impact of treatments

This disease is typically treated using blood transfusions and immunosuppressive medications, particularly steroids. Immunosuppressive medications, especially steroids, may cause severe side effects that have a major effect on quality of life of dogs and their owners.

Treatment side effects

Side effects associated with steroid administration include

- increased urination
- increased water intake
- increased appetite
- muscle atrophy and weakness, possible lethargy
- behavioural changes
- skin changes
- hair loss
- excessive panting
- secondary infections (e.g. skin or urine)

RVC IMHA project

At the RVC, we are conducting investigations using residual (left over) blood samples from dogs with IMHA. We are trying to identify novel markers predicting response to treatment and the likelihood of developing side effects related to medications. We plan to use these markers in future so that bespoke treatments can be tailored for individual dogs. We are aiming to control the disease whilst minimising side effects and maximising the dog's quality of life.



How you can help

We are looking for financial contributions for this study so we can develop tools that lead to improvement in treatments for IMHA. If you wish to contribute, please contact the RVC's registered charity, the Animal Care Trust, on 01707 666237 or act@rvc.ac.uk.