

An excerpt from

Puppy Intensive Care: A Breeders Guide to Care of Newborn Puppies

by **Myra Savant-Harris**, Dogwise Publishing.
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Chapter 8 A Sick Newborn Pup

All Your Assessment Skills are Needed

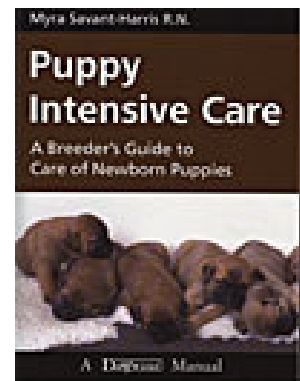
A well puppy can become a sick puppy within hours. That is why you should be checking your puppies several times a day and looking them over every time you pass their pen. Often, a mother will push a chilled pup away. Sometimes, this behavior is misinterpreted as being a sign that the mother knows that something is wrong with the puppy. Actually, she will often reject a chilled puppy because he “feels” unhealthy, not because he is unhealthy. Because he is cold, and won’t root or nurse, she will reject him. Therefore, the first thing would be to make sure that the puppy is warm. Often warming him up is enough. A sick pup will often be separated from his littermates, but so will an otherwise healthy pup who has gotten cold.

A sick puppy will probably not be nursing. If he is trying to nurse, he may be too weak to actually be getting milk from the breast. He may be crying. You may see him nursing at times, but it takes a certain amount of strength to remove milk from the breast. Don’t assume that because a puppy is nursing, he is getting milk. Assess him from head to toe. Weigh each puppy every day; twice daily if you are worried, and record the weights. I’ve included a Puppy Weight Record Chart at the back of the book.

He will usually have his head extended, rather than flexed toward his chest. He will not be twitchy and engaged in that “active” kind of sleep that you will see exhibited by the normal newborn puppy. His legs will often be pulled in toward his body rather than sprawled out. Once you have determined that your puppy is not behaving normally, you need to act quickly and begin your assessment.

Q&A for assessing the puppy

Answer these questions to decide what needs to be done to save your puppy:



Is the puppy warm to the touch?

Pick him up. Feel him. Compare the feeling of his body warmth to that of his littermates. Take his temperature rectally. Feel inside his mouth. For some reason, a sick puppy will often have a very cool mouth even if his body feels (con’t)

Does he have a suck reflex?

Put your fingertip into his mouth. A healthy puppy will have a strong suck reflex that you should be able to feel immediately.

Does he have good muscle tone?

Pull out his little legs. Do they pull right back into position? Is he limp in your hands or pulling himself into a little ball? If he is limp and his head is hanging, you are definitely holding a very sick pup. Prognosis: not good, but worth fighting for.

Is he breathing with his mouth open and gasping or closed?

Gasping is ALWAYS bad. Gasping is the puppy’s reflex action to bring in as much oxygen as possible. A gasping puppy needs oxygen (con’t)

Does he appear to be dehydrated?

When you pull up the skin at the back of the neck, does it stay in a little “tent” or does it spring back quickly? You want it to spring back quickly (con’t)

What is the color of his urine?

Take a clean, white cotton ball and tap his genitals. As you tap his genital area, it will stimulate him to void (con’t)

What is the specific gravity of the puppy’s urine?

This is the way that specific gravity works: water has a specific gravity of 1.000, normal urine has a specific gravity of approximately 1.020, concentrated urine (a sign of dehydration) has a specific gravity of 1.030-1.040 (con’t)

Is the puppy crying for more than 15 minutes or so?

A crying puppy is not unusual unless the crying continues for more than 15 minutes. A normal puppy will tire by then and cry himself to sleep. Prolonged crying is in indication that the puppy is in distress (con't)

Is he cuddled up to his littermates or off by himself?

If he is some distance away from the others, and every time you check the puppies, the same puppy is away from the others, it is time to assess the puppy for signs of illness.

Is the puppy moving around or lying quietly? Is he twitchy?

Remember that the normal, healthy puppy is in almost constant motion—little subtle twitches and jerks. A perfectly still puppy is a puppy with a problem.

Does the umbilical cord site look clean and dry?

It should be drying and falling off within a day or so at most. It shouldn't be reddened, nor should it have an odor. If it shows signs of infection, (redness, swelling, discharge or a foul odor) call the vet immediately and follow her (con't)

Is stool caked around the rectal area of the puppy?

This is often a sign that the puppy has had diarrhea or that the mother has stopped cleaning him, both of which require further assessment.

Are the eyelids clean?

Even if the eyes are still closed, there can be discharge and drainage. Generally speaking, if one or both of the eyes open very early--say at 3-4 days of age--that is a puppy that will need to be observed very carefully (con't)

Are signs of infection present at other open areas?

Check any other open areas--dewclaw removals, tail dockings, etc. Check for the normal signs of infection: redness, swelling, discharge or a foul odor (con't)

Are the lips clean and dry or is there additional moisture there?

Often, a sick baby will have extra moisture around the lips. Sometimes just a clear drool, other times it is bubbly.

When the puppy breathes, are the respirations audible? Do his lungs sound crackly or moist? What is his respiration rate?

Remember that the first day, the respiration rate should be around 8-18 breaths per minute and for the first two weeks after that around 15-35 (con't)

Taken from *Puppy Intensive Care, Book & DVD, \$29.95. Available from Dogwise Publishing, www.dogwise.com or 1-800-776-2665.*

Author **Myra Savant-Harris R.N.** is a breeder of Cavalier King Charles Spaniels who wished there was a book like *Puppy Intensive Care* at the time she started breeding dogs. Myra combines her lifelong interest in animals with her professional experience as a labor and delivery and neonatal care nurse to bring you this information. In addition to continuing work as an R.N., Myra gives seminars around the country on her methods and is currently at work on her next book about reproduction and whelping.