



# HUMANE SOCIETY OF COBB COUNTY

## DISEASE OUTBREAK CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

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**Cobb County Humane Society Disease Outbreaks Of Parvo**

Crisis Communications Plan Team

School of Communications

Kennesaw State University

Professor Emma Wertz

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Tessa Frank

Revised March 4, 2019

Bekah Danforth

Kaitlyn Egbert

Danielle Drexler

Jarrett Geathers

Katie Glover

Keyonna Frisby

Tested: March 5, 2019

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### *Why is this plan important?*

Parvo is a highly contagious virus that spreads quickly. It is most commonly seen in unvaccinated dogs and all puppies younger than four months old. If the virus is not contained, it can spread throughout an entire kennel, food, water bowls, cages, leashes and even the hands of the people dealing with the infected animal. Proper cleaning and disinfection is critical for the infected areas or else the disease will continue to spread (AVMA, 2019). If the crisis plan is not followed, then volunteers, adopters and even the community will lose respect for the organization. In the end, the organization could even be forced to close.

### *What can happen if it is not followed?*

If the crisis plan is not followed in the event of outbreak like this, it could have numerous consequences on the organization. The organization could lose credibility to its publics if the outbreak is large enough to infect the entire kennel or results in death. The organization could also allow someone to adopt a dog who has been infected, which would allow the outbreak to spread outside of the shelter. The price of a parvo outbreak is very expensive and could lead to the business closing, so taking precautions now is essential to lowering the expense in the future (Clasper, 2018). There is also the chance that when losing credibility, you would lose customer trust and the Humane Society would be affected financially.

### *Has the crisis happened here before?*

Cobb County Humane Society has not seen a parvo disease outbreak since its establishment. As much as we would like to maintain this achievement, the facility has a high risk of experiencing a disease outbreak. Parvo outbreaks are common for animal shelters across the nation, so we must be willing to be transparent and honest if a situation like this ever arises.

### *Have there been warning signs?*

Major signs that there is a possible parvo outbreak are vomiting, large amounts of bloody diarrhea and severe dehydration. Most dogs will also suffer from abdominal pain and will not have an appetite, they will have a fever or hypothermia and lethargy. It is important to listen for

the signs from customers who voice concern about their dog. It is critical to act on these warning signs in the first 24 hours to avoid deaths and avoid collecting more expenses. (AVMA, 2019).

*Has it happened in similar organizations?*

Bartow County had an outbreak in 2018, due to shelters not being able to vaccinate incoming animal arrivals (WGCL Digital Team, 2018). Gwinnett County animal shelter also had to shut down for four days in 2015 due to a Parvo outbreak (Estep, 2015). Shelters are constantly trying to keep these illnesses out of their doors, but it is extremely easy for parvo to pass from one animal to another. While it is a very easy illness to catch and spread, Cobb county has not had to deal with parvo as neighboring counties have had to do in years prior.

Without proper attention, this could cause multiple shutdowns and even the inability to take dogs. It could also cause mass euthanasia of dogs that could have been saved if proper protocol was in place. The worst thing that we could do is ignore this issue that we are seeing in other parts of the United States and even in our neighboring counties. With proper protocol and planning we could prevent ourselves the horror of a Parvovirus outbreak in this shelter.

Acknowledgements

By signing this statement, I verify that I have read this plan and am prepared to put it into effect.

President and CEO	_____
Vice President and CFG	_____
Vice President	_____
Office Manager	_____

## **REHEARSAL DATES**

In order to reduce the amount of stress that both the animals and staff would be exposed to, a table top simulation would be the best way to practice a parvo outbreak situation. Since parvo outbreaks usually happen after the seasons change, this simulation should be practiced at least 4 times a year. It should also be included in new employee training sessions, since the impact of a parvo outbreak can be significantly reduced if it is caught early on.

After establishing the goals and objectives when it comes to managing a parvo outbreak, the first thing to go over is the signs and symptoms of parvo. Since parvo is extremely contagious, remaining vigilant and being able to identify the illness early on is key to preventing further contamination. Cobb County Humane Society staff should look for signs of lethargy, loss of appetite, abdominal pain and bloating, hypothermia, vomiting, and severe diarrhea in the animals while doing their daily rounds. They should also advise volunteers and patrons to report these symptoms if they are seen.

The next step would be to establish a contamination protocol. Outline the course of action that needs to happen after an animal starts to show signs of parvo. How to do you isolate the animal, monitor the other animals that may have been exposed to the virus, and how sterilization measures should be taken? There would need to be a separate room where only parvo contaminated animals could stay, apart from the standard isolation room. Animals who came in contact with the animal who showed signs of parvo should be moved out of the room they were in and monitored to make sure they were not infected. The room where the outbreak had started would need to relocate the animals for a period of time and sterilized by deep cleaning with bleach.

Another aspect of the tabletop simulation would be to evaluate how the situation would be handled if the contamination spread to the entire shelter. There would be a chance of having to close the shelter to the public, stop intake of other animals, and provide veterinary care or euthanize the animals who are too sick to recover. The table top should engage the Cobb County Humane Society staff and have them be able to answer questions such as. “how many contaminations would there have to be to close the shelter?” or “when and who makes the veterinary decisions when it comes to a major parvo outbreak?” If the shelter had to close its doors to the public, there would need to be a plan in place to ensure all of the animals are monitored and taken care of. Staff members should be assigned specific roles for if a large scale parvo outbreak happened, whether it be monitoring animals, communicating with the public, veterinary care, or disinfecting the building.

Rehearsal Dates            January 15, 2020

                                     July 15, 2020

**PURPOSE**

In the event of a Canine Parvovirus outbreak, we must immediately inform the public about our situation and warn them of symptoms they need to look for, in case their pet was put at risk. We must communicate about what we are doing to reduce the impact of this crisis, including steps such as isolating each dog to keep the virus from spreading and sanitization efforts. Our open and honest response to the crisis will eliminate all confusion and any questions that the public may have. By remaining transparent and honest, we can learn to correct the issues with our organization and implement actions that would prevent this situation from happening again.

**OBJECTIVES**

We will make every effort to:

- Implement the crisis communication plan within 4 hours
- Inform all staff members of the outbreak within 30 minutes of being aware of it
- Inform all who may be threatened by the virus
- Keep the organization completely open and honest
- Develop a communication plan that lessens the need for the public to have questions

**KEY PUBLICS**

<b>Methods of Communication</b>										
<b>P u b l i c s</b>		Telephone	Email	Newsletter	Meetings	News Release	Letter by Messenger	Letter by Mail	Bulletin Board	
	Media (TV, Radio, Print, Social)		x				x			
	Local Vet Clinics	x					x			
	Adoptive families (adopted within 6 months)	x	x	x			x	x		
	Adoptive families adopted 6+ months ago		x				x			
	Volunteers		x	x				x		
	Executives	x	x			x				
	Employees	x				x			x	
	Donors	x								
	Activist Groups	x			x					



## CRISIS TEAM AND TEAM DIRECTORY

<b>Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>
<b>President/Chair</b>	Stephen Imler	This is the leader of the organization and should be visible during a crisis. He should aid in strategic planning and implementation of policies before, during, and after the crisis. Managing the staff and offering guidance are key characteristics of handling this crisis. He should utilize his relationships with the community in order to inform and reassure the public about the crisis.
<b>Vice President</b>	Eunice Hall	The vice president should work alongside the President in order to advise and manage the staff. He should manage the fiscal aspect of the crisis in order to reduce damage and minimize some of the long term effects that this crisis could produce.
<b>Board Member</b>	Pam Hubby	This member is our expert on daily staff operations of the facility. She should be available to be called upon by members of the Crisis Team to answer any questions they may have.
<b>Board Member</b>	Michele Swann	This member is our expert on the community side of our organization. She has access to all previous adoption paperwork which will be used to contact anyone who could have been affected by the parvo outbreak. She also should be able to use her relationship with the community to aid the spokesperson.
<b>Board Member</b>	Mary Louise Goodie McRae	This member is the expert on veterinary care and pet health.

		<p>She should be available to answer any questions that the spokesperson or public might have about the parvo outbreak and its effects on pets. She should be the main source of pet health information for our organization. She should also be available to the staff offer guidance about veterinary care for the infected animals.</p>
<b>Spokesperson</b>	Sara Martin	<p>This is the who the spotlight is on during our crisis and the key medium between our organization and the public. Responsibilities include speaking with media and concerned citizens, listening to questions and referring to our experts for information. She works under the Communication Director in order to achieve the goals and objectives of managing this crisis.</p>
<b>Communications Director</b>	Sally Jenkins	<p>This key leader will manage everything communications related with this crisis. Whether it is preparing the spokesperson or advising the President/Board Members on how to react to this crisis. She implements and evaluated the tactics used to achieve the goals and objectives. She should review all forms of communication with the public should before it is distributed.</p>

## **MEDIA SPOKESPERSON AND TRAINING**

Sara Martin

- Director, Public Relations for Cobb Humane Society
- Sara Martin is the director of Public Relations for the Cobb Humane Society. Her job during the crisis is to be the spokesperson for the organization and communicate effectively with the public. Her public relations background makes her qualified to help with the crisis.
- Before the crisis, she will stay up to date on current Cobb Humane activities and personnel. During the crisis, she will communicate with local media personnel, and emergency response units about the crisis including, contamination control efforts and future prevention.

Interview Tips

- Be prepared to answer the who, what, when, where, and why questions
- Use information from organizational experts for questions about the animals welfare and veterinary procedures
- Be honest about the severity of the outbreak
- Use everyday language
- Do not make up information to answer questions
- Stay calm
- Give relevant background information
- Focus on the key messages

Trick Questions:

- Naive Questions
  - “Why wasn't the crisis prevented?”
  - “How exactly does parvo spread?”
  - “What are some of the sanitation products that the humane society uses?”
- Leading Questions
  - “You do agree that this outbreak could have been avoided, correct?”
- Loaded Questions
  - “Isn't it true that you knew dogs could have been contaminated before you brought them into the shelter?”

- “Don't you think your shelter officials should have known the symptoms of this disease?”
- Speculative Questions
  - “If the humane society was sanitized correctly could the animals contracted the virus?”
- Chummy Questions
  - “Off the record, do you think the staff’s negligence had anything to do with this outbreak?”
  - “Between me and you, how do you think this outbreak actually happened?”
- False Questions
  - “There was not a supervisor on duty during the sanitation process, correct?”
- Know-it-all Questions
  - “I have all the details, but I just need you to confirm a few things...”

**EMERGENCY PERSONNEL**

<b>Cobb Emergency Veterinary Clinic</b> 630 Cobb Pkwy N, Marietta, GA 30062 770-728-6400	<b>Cobb County Animal Services</b> 1060 Al Bishop Dr, Marietta, GA 30008 770-499-4136
<b>National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases</b> 1600 Clifton Road Atlanta GA 30329 1-800-232-4636	

**EQUIPMENT NEEDED**

Communication units:

- Headsets
- Walkie-Talkies
- Radios (portable)
- Cell phones
- Paper
- Writing utensils
- Recording devices
- Reliable Wi-Fi connection (possible hotspot)
- Media List
- Laptops
- Charging cords for equipment
- Wall charging blocks
- List of login information for social media resources

Contamination kits:

- Gloves
- Shoe covers
- Bleach
- Hoses

For Immediate Release

Media Contact: Sara Martin

xxx-xxx-xxxx, smartin@cchs.com

## Humane Society of Cobb County

### Parvo Outbreak Public Response

**Cobb GA. (April 16, 2019)** - This past week an outbreak of Canine Parvovirus occurred at the Cobb County Humane Society affecting \_\_\_ dogs and killing \_\_\_\_. Canine Parvovirus also referred to as Parvo affects dogs' gastrointestinal tracts and is spread by direct dog-to-dog contact and contact with contaminated feces (stool), environments, or people. Symptoms include lethargy; loss of appetite; abdominal pain and bloating; fever or low body temperature (hypothermia); vomiting; and severe, often bloody, diarrhea. Deaths from this illness usually occur between 48 and 72 hours after symptoms present themselves.

“The Cobb County Humane Society is working to contain the Parvo outbreak and attend to all animals affected,” said, Stephen Imler, president of CCHS. Parvo is incredibly contagious and can spread quickly if immediate actions are not taken. As a precaution the facility has put a full quarantine into effect until containment and recovery can take place, meaning there will be no adoptions or open visits to the shelter until further notice.

“We have contacted all local veterinarian clinics to inform them of the current situation and get advice on how to properly handle Parvo treatment. All dog adopters within the past few months have been contacted as well and given information on how to check their pets for possible parvo infection,” said, Jennifer Baron, secretary for Cobb County Humane.

Cobb County Humane Society takes full responsibility for this outbreak and will proceed with detailed testing of all Canines, as well as treatments for those affected. An intense regimen of cleaning will be put into immediate action and all employees will be fully trained on how to recognize, address, treat and prevent Parvo in the future.

Boilerplate: The mission of the Anna L. Haas Humane Society of Cobb County is to promote humane welfare and responsible animal guardianship through educational community outreach, shelter, and spay/neuter programs.

###

## **FACT SHEET**

**What is Parvo?** Parvo is a highly contagious virus that is commonly seen in unvaccinated dogs and puppies younger than four months. The virus is spread through direct dog to dog contact, contaminated stool, people or environment.

**How is it treated?** There is not a specific drug to treat the virus, but after the diagnosis is confirmed, the infected dog must be isolated from other animals and begin an intensive treatment. The dog is kept warm and start to rebuild its immune system by replenishing electrolytes, protein and fluid.

### **How is it prevented?**

To prevent parvo it is recommended to get the dogs vaccinated, which is the most effective way to prevent the virus. Other preventative measures consist of booster shots after the vaccination, disinfecting possible contaminated areas and limit the exposure of the virus to other dogs.

### **Company Info**

Founded in 1957, the humane society of cobb county started out as a small group within the cobb county Animal Control facilities. Through dedication and determination, the organization purchased its own facility in 2014. Today, the mission is to promote humane welfare and responsible animal guardianship through educational community outreach, shelter and spay programs.

###

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Canine Parvovirus** - The virus affects dogs' gastrointestinal tracts and is spread by direct dog-to-dog contact and contact with contaminated feces (stool), environments, or people. Symptoms include lethargy; loss of appetite; abdominal pain and bloating; fever or low body temperature (hypothermia); vomiting; and severe, often bloody, diarrhea. Deaths from this illness usually occur between 48 and 72 hours after symptoms present themselves.

## **INTERNET SOURCES**

**<https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/health/what-every-puppy-owner-needs-to-know-about-parvo-in-puppies/>**

American Kennel Club: What Every Puppy Owner Needs to Know About Parvo in Puppies

- Common ages that puppies are more susceptible to parvovirus
- Breeds that are at an increased risk
- Time period of being contagious
- Symptoms
- Treatment and Prevention

**<https://www.petfinder.com/dogs/dog-health/parvo-in-dogs/>**

Parvo in Dogs

- Parvo Infection vs Parvo Prevention
- Transmission of Parvo
- Precautions and home remedies
- Shelter safety checks

**<https://healthypets.mercola.com/sites/healthypets/archive/2014/04/18/canine-parvovirus.aspx>**

Parvovirus: This Can Kill Your Dog in Less Than 72 Hours

- Timeline of Parvo
- Available tests to diagnose



## KEY MESSAGES

In the event of an outbreak, Cobb County Humane Society's first priority is to contain the Parvovirus. Figuring out where the Parvo began is vital. The symptoms can include one or more of the following: vomiting, lack of appetite and bloody diarrhea. CCHS's first course of action is to attend to the dogs who have been infected, then proceeding with treatment of the virus so that it does not continue to spread. In order to figure out the source of the virus, the humane society must give every dog a fecal test. When the dogs have been isolated from the outbreak, employee's will work hard to disinfect every part of the kennel. Promising that the source of the Parvo will be found and treated, as well as all dogs being thoroughly tested before entering the kennel. We will reiterate consistently the fact that we are very concerned with the Parvo outbreak and that our primary concern is for the dogs infected and preventing further contamination. We will explain that our employees will be further trained for this situation and have signed documentation stating what tests each animal must go through before taking them into the shelter.

\_\_\_\_many dogs died from the Parvo outbreak at Cobb County Humane Society.

Most of CCHS's culture involves volunteers from around the community. CCHS strictly relies on donations in order to keep the Cobb County Humane Society running.

1. **The following key messages should be stressed to media (TV, Radio, Print, Social):**  
We sincerely apologize to all who have been affected by the parvo outbreak. We have found the source and have completely treated the dog. In order to prevent this from happening again, we have taken steps to train our employees. Thank you for your patience.
2. **The following key messages should be stressed to local vet clinics:** We take full responsibility for the unfortunate circumstances that have taken place. We treat our animals with the love and care they deserve. In order to prevent this from happening again, we have taken steps to train our employees. We appreciate your help during this time. Thank you.
3. **The following key messages should be stressed to adoptive families:** We sincerely apologize to all who have been affected by the parvo outbreak. We have found the source and have completely treated the dog. In order to prevent this from happening again, we

have taken steps to train our employees. This is an upsetting event for all of us but we have learned from our mistakes. Thank you for your patience.

4. **The following key messages should be stressed to volunteers:** We sincerely apologize to all who have been affected by the parvo outbreak. We have found the source and have completely treated the dog. In order to prevent this from happening again, we have taken steps to train our employees. We appreciate your patience and willingness.
5. **The following key messages should be stressed to executives:** We take full responsibility for the unfortunate circumstances that have taken place. We treat our animals with the love and care they deserve. In order to prevent this from happening again, we have taken steps to train our employees. Thank you.
6. **The following key messages should be stressed to employees:** We sincerely apologize to all who have been affected by the parvo outbreak. We have found the source and have completely treated the dog. In order to prevent this from happening again, we have taken steps to train our employees. We appreciate your patience and willingness.
7. **The following key messages should be stressed to donors:** We sincerely apologize to all who have been affected by the parvo outbreak. We have found the source and have completely treated the dog. In order to prevent this from happening again, we have taken steps to train our employees. We appreciate your patience and willingness.
8. **The following key messages should be stressed to activist groups:** We take full responsibility for the unfortunate circumstances that have taken place. We treat our animals with the love and care they deserve. In order to prevent this from happening again, we have taken steps to train our employees. Thank you.

**MEDIA LIST****Radio**

<b>Station/Channel</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>
Georgia Public Broadcasting Radio	260 14th NW Atlanta, Ga 30318	404-685-2670
WPBA-FM	740 Bismark rd, NE Atlanta, Ga 30324	678-686-3260
WSB-FM	1601 Peachtree ST NE Atlanta, Ga 30309	404-897-2277
WCFO-AM	1100 Spring st NW Atlanta, Ga 30309	404- 681-9307

**Television**

<b>Station/Channel</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>
WSB-TV Channel 2 Action News	1601 West Peachtree St. NE, Atlanta, GA 30309	404-897-7000
WGCL CBS 46	425 14th Street NW Atlanta, GA 30318	404-327-3200
WXIA-TV 11 Alive	One Monroe Place NE Atlanta, Ga., 30324	404-892-1611
WAGA-TV Fox 5 Atlanta	1551 Briarcliff Rd NE, Atlanta, GA 30306	404-898-0100

**Print**

<b>Station/Channel</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>
Atlanta Journal-Constitution	223 Perimeter Center Pkwy, Atlanta, GA 30346	404-526-2647
Marietta Daily Journal	47 Waddell St. SE Marietta, GA 30060	770-428-9411
Atlanta Pet Life Journal	Buckhead Area	404-538-9895
The East Cobber	1620 Penwood Trce Marietta, GA 30068	770-640-7070
Family Life Publications	630 E Main St Canton, GA 30114	770-213-7095

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Cobb Humane Society ensures the utmost safety of all the animals and facilities alike. With the recent outbreak of parvo in the shelter, facilities were temporarily closed to quarantine and perform tests on the animals. Shelters have been thoroughly cleansed and employees have been briefed on how to recognize signs and symptoms to prevent further outbreak. All dog adopters within the past few months have been contacted with information on how to check their pets for parvo. CHS accepts full responsibility for this outbreak and will continue to perform comprehensive tests on canines to prevent further outbreaks as well as treatments for those affected.

Please include these pictures on the website and the following links

<https://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/canine-parvovirus.aspx>

<https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/health/parvo-in-dogs/>



## **BLOG**

### When Outbreak Begins:

Cobb County Humane Society has had a parvovirus outbreak on \_\_\_\_\_. We are currently working on steps to ensure the safety of our animals that are up for adoption. The safety of our animals is our first priority and we are branching out to veterinary clinics to take steps in testing the animals and contacting anyone who has adopted from our shelter. As soon as we find out more updates, we will alert the media and contact those involved.

### During Parvo Outbreak:

Cobb County Humane Society is currently handling a parvo outbreak within the shelter. Parvo has been found to be highly contagious and we are handling this issue immediately and with severe caution. We are partnering with Cobb Emergency Veterinary Clinic to check up each animal that may have been infected.

Please keep a close eye on your pet and research all the symptoms to ensure the safety of your pet. We are removing all canines that have been tested positive for parvo and securing them at the Emergency Vet Clinic until they are deemed able to be put up for adoption.

### After Outbreak:

Cobb County Humane Society quickly responded to a parvo outbreak after \_\_\_\_\_ dogs passed away. After the crisis was brought to light, CCHS worked closely with Cobb Emergency Veterinary Clinic to test each of puppies that could have been affected. Any of the puppies that tested positive were quickly transported to the clinic and were vaccinated and closely monitored.

Families that have adopted from the shelter have been contacted and were sent emails with instructions on how to monitor their animals and how to spot symptoms of parvo. Several of the puppies from the shelter that were tested positive have been safely brought back to the shelter and are healthy once again. Precautions and extensive training has been taken to ensure parvo does not become an issue once again.

## EVALUATION

After a crisis, the following steps will be followed to ensure that the Cobb County Humane Society is more prepared in the future. The society will take full responsibility but there will be aspects of what CCHS can improve on. This plan will cover all aspects of the crisis, including media relations, crisis management team, and community relations. It is vital to implement the plan within 24 hours of the outbreak.

1. **Media Relations:** In order to ensure false information was not provided, CCHS should set aside time to schedule an interview or a phone-call interview. It would be best to have photos planned ahead of time to send to the media relations outlets rather than them taking their own.
2. **Crisis Management Team:** Was a plan set up in case of an outbreak? Employers should be informed on what to do in case of an outbreak like parvo. The team should contact all employees then reach out to the media before anything breaks loose. Even after time continues, the management team needs to schedule updates.
3. **Community Relations:** Before the crisis, was the community backing up CCHS and what they stand for? When a crisis happens, it's important for the community to stand up and acknowledge how this doesn't happen often. How can we gain support from the community?

**Implement the crisis communication plan within 4 hours:** A focus group has been conducted to ask questions on whether the plan was effectively communicated. Questions were solely based on the time limit, how we communicated through the channels and the way our animals were treated.

**Inform all staff members of the outbreak within 30 minutes of being aware of it:** We sent out a survey for staff members to complete asking them if they knew about the crisis quickly enough.

**Inform all who may be threatened by the virus:** We sent out letters to recent customers and made sure they feel comfortable about adopting pets from CCHS in the future.

**Keep the organization completely open and honest:** By reading articles and interviews, it will become obvious if CCHS was open and honest.

**Develop a communication plan that lessens the need for the public to have questions:** We developed a Q & A on our website for all to comment on any questions or insecurities they had.

From our evaluations, the people had a very positive outlook on this feature to help answer any questions they had.



### References

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