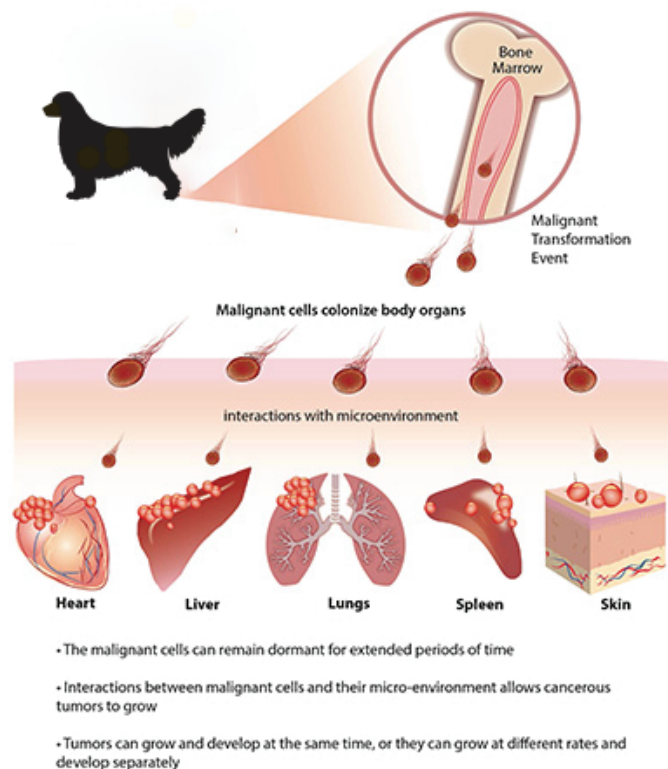


Hemangiosarcoma

This aggressive cancer is cancer of the vascular endothelium, or the blood vessel walls. It accounts for 0.2 to 3 percent of all canine tumours with a mean age at diagnosis of 9 to 12 years. It is a bleeding tumour and most commonly affects the spleen and heart but can be found in other organs. It is estimated 25 percent of dogs that present with splenic hemangiosarcoma also have a tumour of the heart. With this tumour the danger occurs when the tumour breaks open and the dog bleeds internally. It happens quickly, appearing to strike with very little warning. Because metastasis and local invasion occur early in the course of this disease, many cases are not diagnosed until the ruptured tumour tissue causes catastrophic haemorrhage.

Formation and Spread of Canine Hemangiosarcoma



Signs of hemangiosarcoma

Dogs with hemangiosarcoma may show non-specific signs such as lethargy and anorexia, which may be intermittent if small haemorrhages of the tumour occur repeatedly. Unfortunately, a common presentation is collapse, increased heart and respiratory rates, and pale mucous membranes caused by substantial haemorrhage of a ruptured tumour. Learn to assess your dog's mucous membranes by lifting the upper lip to examine the colour of the gums and lip. Practice this exam regularly to learn what is normal for your dog in various lighting conditions, as prompt diagnosis and treatment of this disease is critical for your dog's survival.

Prognosis and Treatment

Because hemangiosarcoma is often associated with substantial haemorrhage and a very poor prognosis, the difficult decision must often be made at the time of diagnosis to a) pursue emergency surgery to remove the bleeding tumour, or b) euthanize the dog. Median survival time following surgery alone for splenic hemangiosarcoma is two to three months, and for cardiac hemangiosarcoma, three to five months. Traditional chemotherapy may improve survival to 4 to 7 months, but no single protocol has shown superiority. Emerging therapies such as immunotherapy, antimetastatic agents, and mushroom extracts show promise for prolonging survival.

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