



ABOUT THE DISEASE

Mastitis is inflammation of one or more mammary gland associated with a bacterial infection. This occurs most commonly in canine patients after whelping (giving birth), and less commonly in feline patients after queening (giving birth). Rarely, mastitis is seen in lactating pseudopregnant female dogs. (Please see the [Pseudopregnancy](#) document for additional information.)

Risk factors for developing **mastitis** include:

- Poor sanitary conditions – bedding, flooring, high fecal presence (diarrhea), etc.
- Trauma inflicted by offspring.
- A systemic bacterial infection.

In acute (sudden) **mastitis**, the affected gland(s) are hot, swollen, and painful. If acute **mastitis** progresses to septic (spread of bacterial infection) **mastitis**, patients may develop severe and life-threatening symptoms which may include fever, depression, anorexia (unwillingness to eat), lethargy, vomiting, and diarrhea. Due to the severity of this condition, many mothers will stop nursing and start neglecting natural care of offspring.

In chronic (long-lasting) or subclinical **mastitis**, clinical signs may not be as noticeable. While they're similar to acute **mastitis**, the only symptom may be that the offspring are failing to thrive.

It is not impossible for the offspring to intake bacteria from infected teats and develop serious infections as well. While this is less common, it is important to have a working relationship with a veterinarian to quickly assess failing litters and poor-doing mothers.

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis is often made from a thorough physical examination and clinical history.

Microscopic examination of milk may reveal a high level of inflammatory cells and bacteria. In some circumstances, a milk culture can be performed to determine the type of bacteria present.

Routine laboratory testing will often be utilized to assess the health of the mother and help determine if septic **mastitis** is starting to develop.

TREATMENT

The cornerstone of therapy is one or a combination of broad-spectrum antibiotics. However, depending on the clinical health of the mother, some require hospitalization for intravenous (IV) fluid therapy and antibiotics.

Antibiotic therapy is always a concern for nursing dogs, but treatment should not be withheld from the mother because of this risk. Many of the common antibiotics utilized in nursing mothers are not a severe risk for the litter.

Hot-packing the affected gland encourages drainage and seems to relieve discomfort.

In severe cases, glands may rupture which warrant surgical intervention, but is not the first line of treatment in mild cases.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Use proper hygiene techniques and provide each mother and litter a safe, warm, and clean environment.
- Supplement offspring feeding with milk replacer as necessary.
- Treat the mother; do not risk her health for the offspring.