PAW HEALTH NETWORK INC.

IMMUNE MEDIATED HEMOLYTIC ANEMIA

ABOUT THE DISEASE

Anemia is low red blood cells. Immune-mediated hemolytic anemia (IMHA), common in dogs, occurs when the immune system destroys RBCs.

This destruction is classified into two categories:

- Primary – no identifiable cause (genetic, spontaneous, etc.)
- Secondary – caused by some other factor (cancer, vaccines, medications, etc.)

Destruction occurs in two locations:

- Intravascular – inside of the blood stream
    - Patients often develop clinical signs very rapidly and usually have a poor prognosis.
- Extravascular – outside of the blood stream, typically within the spleen and liver
    - Patients often develop clinical signs a bit slower, are usually more stable, and have a bit better prognosis.

Symptoms depend on destruction speed/severity: weakness, pale gums, labored breathing, icterus/jaundice, port-wine urine, collapse, death. IMHA often pairs with IMTP (immune platelet destruction for clotting).

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

A simple blood count identifies anemia, but IMHA requires specific tests: saline autoagglutination (slide clumping unique to IMHA), RBC microscopic evaluation, and Coombs test (detects anti-RBC antibodies). Coombs needs an outside lab, delaying confirmation.

TREATMENT

IMHA therapy suppresses immune RBC destruction, tailored to stability. Unstable intravascular cases require hospitalization: IV fluids, ±oxygen, supportive care.

All receive glucocorticoids (steroids); severe cases add immunosuppressants like azathioprine, cyclosporine, or cyclophosphamide. Transfusions are controversial but sometimes needed. Most get anticoagulants to prevent clots.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- IMHA is life-threatening, but first-week responders often recover long-term.
- Give meds exactly as directed; don't alter/stop without vet approval—contact for side effects.
- Even in remission, recurrence is possible; monitor symptoms closely.