

Canine Splenic Hemangiosarcoma

What is canine splenic hemangiosarcoma?

Hemangiosarcoma (HSA) is the most common primary tumor of the spleen in dogs and leads to the formation of abnormal blood vessels which can rupture and bleed. This tumor can also be found in the liver, skin, and heart. HSA is aggressive both locally and has a high rate of spread to other places in the body.

What are the clinical signs of hemangiosarcoma?

Most dogs with hemangiosarcoma will have a sudden episode where they are very tired, unable to rise, or do not want to participate in their usual activities. You may notice their belly looks full or distended. This is due to bleeding from the spleen that occurs as the blood vessels in the spleen are damaged. Sometimes they will have waxing and waning signs as they compensate for blood loss, recover, and then bleed again. Hemangiosarcoma can also cause sudden death.

How is hemangiosarcoma diagnosed?

The diagnosis of hemangiosarcoma is based on biopsy of the bleeding tumor. This usually requires surgical removal of the spleen, and this usually happens as an emergency. Hemangiosarcoma frequently spreads to other parts of the body, so looking for disease spread in the rest of the abdomen (either with an abdominal ultrasound or during surgery), in the chest with x-rays, and potentially evaluating the heart with an echocardiogram are important tests to complete to assess the disease status.

How is hemangiosarcoma treated?

The mainstay of treatment is removal of the spleen via surgery. Following surgery, chemotherapy is strongly recommended due to the aggressiveness of HSA and the short survival time with surgery alone (1-3 months). The chemotherapy of choice is doxorubicin given once every 2-3 weeks for a total of 6 doses. This may be followed by low-dose oral chemotherapy.

What is the prognosis following a hemangiosarcoma diagnosis?

Although HSA has an overall guarded prognosis, the literature does indicate some improvement in survival time with administration of doxorubicin. Without surgery, most pets succumb to their disease within one month. With surgery alone, survival times range from 1 to 3 months. With the addition of chemotherapy dogs have a median survival time closer to 6 months.