

What is Pyometra?



Pyometra describes a life-threatening uterine infection that most typically affects older, intact (or unspayed), female pets. The uterus is also known as the womb and is where the developing fetus is located. It is a serious and life-threatening condition that must be treated promptly and aggressively.

Pyometra is often the result of hormonal changes in the reproductive tract. As intact female pets age, the hormones that fluctuate during each oestrus cycle change the uterus – it becomes thicker and engorged with tissue to support potential pregnancy. As these changes occur year after year, the uterus can be permanently changed – it becomes thicker and engorged with excess tissue. These changes make the uterus especially prone to developing infection and quite poor at fighting off infection if it does occur.

The cervix is the gateway to the uterus. It remains tightly closed except during oestrus. When it is open, bacteria that are normally found in the vagina can enter the uterus rather easily. If the uterus is normal, the environment is adverse to bacterial survival; however, when the uterine wall is thickened and cystic, perfect conditions exist for bacterial growth. In addition, when these abnormal conditions exist, the muscles of the uterus cannot contract properly. This means that bacteria that enter the uterus cannot be expelled.

The best and only prevention for pyometra is to have your dog spayed. Spaying removes the hormonal stimulation that causes both heat cycles and the uterine changes that allow pyometra to happen. It is considerably safer (and less expensive) to spay a healthy dog with a healthy uterus than it is to take a sick dog with an abnormal uterus to surgery.