

HISTIOCYTIC SARCOMA IN DOGS INFORMATION HANDOUT

Histiocytic sarcoma is a rare and aggressive cancer that arises from histiocytes—immune cells that include macrophages and dendritic cells. It is considered a distinct disease because of its unique behavior, and while related to soft tissue sarcomas, it behaves differently, often spreading quickly throughout the body.

Which Dogs Are Affected?

Histiocytic sarcoma typically affects middle-aged to older dogs, but it can occur as young as 3 years. It is more commonly seen in:

- Bernese Mountain Dogs
- Rottweilers
- Flat-Coated Retrievers
- Golden Retrievers

However, any breed can be affected.

Types of Histiocytic Sarcoma

There are two main forms:

- **Localized:** Affects a single area such as a joint, spleen, lymph node, skin, brain, or lung.
- **Disseminated:** Involves multiple sites or organs, with cancer spreading throughout the body.

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms vary based on the location but can include:

- Lethargy, decreased appetite, weight loss
- Lameness or swelling if affecting joints
- Coughing or breathing difficulties if in the lungs
- Vomiting, diarrhea, or abdominal swelling if in internal organs
- Neurological signs if in the brain

Diagnosis

A definitive diagnosis may involve:

- Fine needle aspiration or biopsy of a mass
- Blood tests and urinalysis
- Chest x-rays or CT scan
- Abdominal ultrasound
- Sampling nearby lymph nodes
- Advanced imaging (MRI or CT) where appropriate

Staging (Determining Spread)

Staging helps determine how far the cancer has spread and may include:

- Chest x-rays or CT
- Abdominal ultrasound
- Lymph node sampling
- Bone marrow testing (if needed)

Treatment Options

1. Definitive (Curative-Intent) Therapy

- **Surgery:** Removal of the tumor (e.g., amputation for joint tumors or splenectomy).
- **Chemotherapy:** Often follows surgery to slow spread. Lomustine (CCNU) is the most commonly used drug.
- **Radiation therapy:** May be used after surgery if complete tumor removal isn't possible.

While not always curative, this approach can significantly prolong survival and improve quality of life.

2. Palliative Therapy

For dogs with widespread disease or where curative treatment isn't possible:

- **Pain relief:** NSAIDs, Gabapentin, Tramadol, or other medications
- **Radiation therapy:** To manage pain, especially for joint tumors
- **Chemotherapy:** To reduce tumor burden and extend life
- **Pamidronate:** A bone-strengthening drug sometimes used off-label

What to Expect

- The median survival time for localized disease with surgery and chemotherapy may be around 6 months, though this can vary.
- Dogs treated palliatively may survive 3–4 months on average, sometimes longer with multimodal care.
- Each dog is unique, and responses to treatment vary widely.

Monitoring and Follow-Up

Regular check-ups, blood tests, and imaging are crucial to track disease progression and adjust treatment.

Prognosis

Histiocytic sarcoma is a serious diagnosis, but with early intervention and appropriate care, many dogs can enjoy good quality of life for months. Your vet will work closely with you to determine the best plan based on your dog's specific condition and your goals for care.