

Immune Mediated Haemolytic Anaemia (IMHA)

What is IMHA?

Immune mediated haemolytic anaemia is a condition that results from the body's own immune system damaging and destroying red blood cells. The immune system helps us to fight infection and normally does not attack the body's own cell, however, in IMHA the immune system becomes confused and destroys healthy red blood cells. This then causes the patient to become anaemic (low red blood cell count).

IMHA can occur in dogs and cats without an underlying cause, this is called primary IMHA. In other causes there is an underlying cause and this is known as secondary IMHA. Underlying causes include:

- Inflammatory/infectious disease
- Underlying cancer
- Recent vaccination
- Certain drugs and toxins

The red blood cells job is to carry oxygen around the body. As red blood cells are destroyed the patient becomes anaemic. This can result in signs of illness including:

- Pale or yellow gums
- Lethargy
- Increased respiration rate and effort
- High body temperature
- Inappetence

How do we test your pet for IMHA?

A full clinical examination and history is important. Blood samples are taken to evaluate red blood cells numbers, size and shape. Other blood and urine samples may be used to evaluate general organ function.

Primary IMHA is diagnosed once underlying causes are ruled out therefore imaging of the chest and abdomen is recommended. This is to look for underlying causes of IMHA.



How do we treat IMHA?

If patients are very anaemic they may require a blood transfusion. This involves giving another dog or cat's blood to your pet to stabilise them to give time for medication to work. Pets will be blood typed before a transfusion to be matched to a donor.

When treating IMHA we use drugs to suppress the immune system which has become overreactive and destroying the red blood cells. The most common treatment involves using corticosteroids over a periods of several months and on some occasions an additional immunosuppressive agent is also required eg. ciclosporin, mycophenolate or azathioprine.

Patients with IMHA also have higher risk of forming blood clots therefore they are often given anti-clotting medications as part of their treatment.

When the patient has secondary IMHA the underlying cause needs to be treated if possible.

What is the prognosis for IMHA?

IMHA has a variable prognosis. In patients that respond to immunosuppressive treatment with primary IMHA the prognosis is good although it is possible for relapses to occur. With secondary IMHA the prognosis is dependent on the ability to treat the underlying process.

Sadly with some cases it can be very difficult to control the immune response, this can cause life threatening anaemia and other secondary complications.

To book in for your pet in for a health check or testing, please call us on 01423 228080 or visit www.clarohillvets.co.uk.