

Hemangiosarcoma in Dogs
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Hemangiosarcoma is a malignant cancer that originates from the cells that comprise blood vessels (endothelial cells). Some breeds of dogs, such as Golden Retrievers and German shepherds, are predisposed to developing this disease, and the most common sites of origin include the spleen, right auricle/atrium of the heart, and subcutaneous tissue below the skin. Unfortunately, hemangiosarcoma is a very aggressive type of cancer which tends to metastasize (spread) to intra-abdominal organs and the lungs, which makes the long-term prognosis poor for most dogs with this cancer type.

The standard of care for splenic hemangiosarcomas that have not yet metastasized to the lungs consists of surgery to remove the measurable (bulky or visible) disease followed by chemotherapy to delay the progression of metastatic disease. The average survival time with this combination of treatments is 6-8 months, versus a couple of months with surgery alone. For patients who do have distant metastasis to the lungs at the time of diagnosis, surgery may not be recommended, although chemotherapy may be an option to attempt to slow progression of metastatic disease and maintain a good quality of life.

The treatments and prognosis for patients with muscular and subcutaneous hemangiosarcoma are similar to that described above for splenic hemangiosarcoma. When surgical removal is not an option, palliative radiation therapy (administration of a few large doses of radiation therapy) can instead be considered to slow the growth of the tumor, in addition to chemotherapy.

It is important that patients with any form of hemangiosarcoma be monitored by their owners at home for signs of hemorrhage (bleeding) that can occur as their cancer progresses over time. Signs of bleeding that should prompt immediate veterinary attention include: pale gums/mucous membranes, lethargy, collapse, and exercise intolerance.