

Splenic hemangiosarcomas

Hemangiosarcomas are very aggressive malignant tumours of the vessels. They most often occur in the spleen but can occur in the liver, heart or skin. They shed cancer cells through the blood vessels and rapidly spread to other organs. They are more common in larger breed dogs such as German Shepherds and Golden Retrievers.

Clinical signs can be vague, such as collapse, lameness, weight loss, anaemia, ataxia, dementia or sudden death. They can be episodic, seeming to come and go. This is because these tumours can bleed, either a little or a lot. Little bleeds can lead to anaemia, pain from stretching of the capsule around the tumour, weakness. Large bleeds can cause collapse or sudden death.

As the tumours grow rapidly they are often detected by feeling a large swelling in the abdomen but they may be suspected after routine blood tests as they can produce typical blood changes. X-rays or ultrasound are often required for diagnosis.

Removal of the spleen is possible and can give short-term relief but as the cancer has usually spread the prognosis is poor, averaging 2 months in some studies. Even with chemotherapy (available as specialised clinics) <10% of cases survive more than a year.