



Kennel Cough

“Kennel cough” is a common term used for a disease complex involving a respiratory infection in dogs. Several different bacteria and viruses can cause it. It is also called “infectious tracheobronchitis” meaning an



infection of the airway (the trachea and bronchi). It’s called kennel cough because it’s highly contagious and dogs are much

more likely to be infected in crowded areas such as a kennel. The classic sign is a dry, hacking cough.

Kennel cough is not a simple infection caused by one organism and some dogs will be infected with more than one organism at the same time. This means not all dogs with kennel cough will act the same.

Fortunately, most dogs who get sick have a mild form and recover without any problems.

How It’s Spread

Dogs can shed these organisms before they show signs of illness. That means they are contagious before you know they are sick. This makes it easy for them to spread the infection. They continue to shed for generally 7-14 days afterwards allowing plenty of time to infect other dogs.

Droplets from the respiratory tract of a sick dog spread these infections. The droplets come from sneezing, coughing, or sharing a water bowl.

A dog can also get the organism from a contaminated object such as bedding shared by dogs.

Coughing and sneezing spread these organisms readily and we haven’t figured out how to teach dogs to cover their mouths!

Signs

Coughing is the most common sign seen. It is often hacking and comes on suddenly. Often the dog will gag at the end of a coughing spell and may spit up foamy, white mucous.

The throat is sensitive and lightly feeling it will often trigger a coughing spell. Dogs will often cough more if they exercise. In mild forms, the dog is feeling fine and eating normally. The cough may linger for several weeks even after the infection is gone.



Dogs may also be sneezing, have a watery discharge from their nose, or runny eyes. They may have tonsillitis or an inflamed throat.

If the condition is more serious, the dog may have a fever, be lethargic, have a heavy discharge from the nose, doesn’t want to eat, and may even have trouble breathing. The dog could develop pneumonia.

Since all of these infections look similar, especially at the beginning, it’s impossible to know which organism is causing the disease just by the signs. Most veterinarians do not run tests to find out which organism is the culprit unless the dog is very sick or not responding to treatment.

Treatment

Antibiotics may not be needed if the only sign is a cough. However, some veterinarians will treat with antibiotics in case bacteria are involved to prevent the infection from spreading to the lungs and causing pneumonia. Probiotics should be given along with antibiotics and have the added benefit of helping the immune system.

Most dogs are coughing enough that they need cough suppressants. This will help everyone sleep better and reduces the irritation to the throat.

Taking some steps to minimize stress will help to avoid complications and keep the disease from worsening. Resting, little exercise (just enough to potty), reducing excitement, and not allowing tugging on a collar will help to reduce coughing fits and lessen irritation to the throat.

Vaccination

Vaccines are available for several of the organisms that can cause kennel cough. The distemper/parvo combo that all dogs should receive protects against adenovirus type 2. Some combo vaccines also include parainfluenza. Both of these are viruses that can cause kennel cough.

Bordetella bronchiseptica is a bacterium and one of the more common causes of kennel cough. Bordetella is the vaccine that many people call the kennel cough vaccine.



Vaccinate all dogs that go to dog parks, doggy day care, boarding or grooming facilities or anywhere else a lot of dogs congregate together.

Summary

Kennel cough is usually not serious in most dogs. However, there is the potential for serious complications.

If your dog gets kennel cough, keep him away from other dogs for two weeks. Keep exercise and activity to a bare minimum. Have him examined to make sure it's nothing else and to get whatever medications are advised.