



The Vet is In

Kennel Cough – Everything you need to know

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A small number of cases of Kennel Cough have been reported to the Club recently. This article provides some useful information about this illness.

Kennel Cough is the common term for a condition more correctly known as Infectious Tracheobronchitis. As the name suggests, the condition is caused by infectious agents such as viruses, bacteria and rickettsia (micro-organisms similar to bacteria). The trachea and the bronchi (the big and medium-sized airways to the lungs) are the parts of the body that are inflamed by the infection.



What's in a name?

The common name 'Kennel Cough' is given because boarding kennels are often one of the places where these infections can be contracted. here are four main reasons for this:

- Dogs in boarding kennels are stressed and so their immune systems are not as effective as they may be at other times.
- Dogs in boarding kennels come from many different locations and often bring different strains of the infectious agents with them. Dogs from other locations that come to the kennels may be immunologically naïve, not having encountered these different strains, and so be more susceptible to infection.
- Dogs in boarding kennels often bark more than usual, thus inflaming their upper airways and leaving them more susceptible to infection.
- Dogs in boarding kennels are kept in close proximity to each other and so it is easier for the infection to spread.

It is clear that these causal factors can also occur in many other situations. The cause is not related to poor hygiene or the general care of dogs in kennels.

Kennel Cough is highly contagious, with infected dogs shedding the agents in their secretions which both drip where they stop and sniff, and spread as they cough. So, even dogs that are just going for a walk can pick up an

infection by sniffing about where other infected dogs have sniffed.

Symptoms

The incubation period for Kennel Cough is usually 5-10 days but with a range of 2-14 days depending on the infectious agent involved. The course of the infection is usually about the same, although in some dogs the cough can persist for 3-4 weeks. The cough is characteristically harsh and paroxysmal. Most dogs remain relatively bright and active during the infection although some may become lethargic and go off their food. Although rare, dogs can develop pneumonia and become seriously ill. Dogs with pre-existing cardio-respiratory conditions, such as congestive heart failure, or dynamic airway disease, are more at risk of complications. Very old dogs and puppies are also more susceptible.

Care and treatment

Exercise and excitement exacerbate the symptoms, as does breathing very dry air. So keeping your dog calm and quiet at home and humidifying the air helps to minimise their distress. Antibiotics may reduce the duration of the infection if the causal agent is bacterial and certainly reduces the risk of secondary bacterial infection. Cough suppressants and anti-inflammatories are also sometimes used if the cough is particularly severe.

The infectious period lasts for as long as the dog shows symptoms. It is very important to keep your dog at home during this time. This applies especially to taking your dog to places where lots of dogs congregate. So, coming to training classes is definitely out as is visiting dog parks or going to dog shows or trials. Also, ideally, it is better not to take them for walks.

Prevention

Vaccination is available for several of the major causal agents of Kennel Cough, particularly the bacteria *Bordetella bronchiseptica* and the viruses Canine Adenovirus and Canine Parainfluenza. However, the vaccinations only protect against these agents specifically – just as human flu vaccines protect against certain strains of flu and not the common cold.