

Kennel cough (acute tracheobronchitis)



Kennel cough is not a serious disease in most otherwise healthy dogs. However, it is very contagious and will spread rapidly around the dog population. As its name suggests, it causes coughing that can go on for a month in some cases.

What is kennel cough?

Kennel cough is caused by a combination of viruses and bacteria including:

- Canine parainfluenzavirus
- Canine adenovirus
- Bordetella bronchiseptica

These agents get into the body and cause irritation to the windpipe resulting in coughing. It is called kennel cough because it is so infectious that if one dog in a kennel gets it the cough will spread rapidly through the rest of the dogs there.

Why vaccinate dogs before kennelling?

Good kennels will insist that your dog is vaccinated against this disease before agreeing to take them for boarding. This is to prevent the spread of the disease through other dogs in the kennel. Even if your dog is fit and healthy and would not suffer as a result of catching kennel cough, there may be older or more vulnerable dogs staying in the kennels at the same time. The protection given by the specific kennel cough vaccinations when they are administered into the nose (intranasal) lasts 12 months. It may therefore be wise to separate this vaccination from your dog's routine boosters. Most dogs only receive intranasal kennel cough vaccinations at times of potential high risk, ie before going into kennels. Many kennels prefer that the vaccination is given around 14 days before the animal is admitted to kennels so make sure you arrange this in plenty of time. Ask your vet for details of how to protect your dog against kennel cough before putting it in kennels.

What are the signs of kennel cough?

As its name suggests this condition causes a cough. Most dogs are not really unwell when they have the disease although occasionally they have a high temperature and are a bit 'out of sorts' for a day or two. The cough is dry and hacking and it often sounds as if your dog is choking on something stuck in his throat. The cough gets worse for a few days and then gradually goes away after about 3 weeks.

How do vets diagnose kennel cough?

Your vet will probably know what is wrong with your dog from your description of the symptoms. It is very rare for further tests to be required.

Is there any treatment for the cough?

There are treatments that will make your dog get better more quickly - basically they have to fight off the infection themselves. Very rarely, if the infection spreads to the chest, or if your dog is unwell in himself, your vet may prescribe some antibiotic tablets. However, these will not stop the coughing more quickly, nor will they make it safe for your dog to mix with other dogs. Your vet may prescribe some cough linctus to make the coughing less severe and this is normally given if your dog is having a particularly severe coughing fit. There are some tablets that can help to reduce coughing but these would only be given if there were a medical reason why it was dangerous for your dog to cough.

Is there anything else I can do to help?

Just as in people with a cold, coughing is brought on by exercise, excitement and exposure to cold air. If your dog has kennel cough you should keep them in a warm environment (where possible) and try not to exercise them too much. Avoid situations where your dog is likely to bark, as this is highly likely to cause coughing. If your dog normally wears a collar, take this off, to stop it irritating his throat, and exercise him outside with a harness or halter and lead. Above all be responsible - remember that other dogs are at risk of catching the cough from your dog. Do not take him to places where he is likely to meet other dogs (particularly in closed spaces like dog training classes) while he is still coughing and for a few days after.

Will my dog get better?

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Most dogs recover quickly from kennel cough. A young, otherwise healthy dog, should not be unwell with the disease and the cough should get better within 2-3 weeks. Very young or old dogs and dogs with other diseases may be much more severely affected by kennel cough. It would be very unusual indeed for a dog to die as a direct result of catching kennel cough.

Can kennel cough be prevented?

There are several vaccines available which can protect your dog against the different viruses and bacteria that can cause kennel cough. Many of these vaccines are given as drops into the nose, although some are available as injections too. Ask your vet for details if you are not sure which diseases your dog is protected against.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your dog please contact Unicorn Vets on 023 8034 3434 and we will be happy to advise you.