

Kennel Cough in Dogs

Kennel Cough in Dogs: What You Should Know

Kennel cough is a common respiratory infection in dogs, often compared to a chest cold in humans. It's caused by a mix of bacteria and viruses, and while it's usually not dangerous, it can be a nuisance for your dog and may lead to complications in puppies, elderly dogs, or those with preexisting health conditions.



What Exactly Is Kennel Cough?

Kennel cough, also known as infectious bronchitis, affects a dog's respiratory system, causing a distinct, hacking cough. The name comes from how easily it spreads in kennels, where dogs are in close quarters. Just like humans can catch a cold from various germs, dogs can get kennel cough from a combination of bacteria and viruses.

What Does a Dog's Cough Sound Like?



The main symptom of kennel cough is a loud, persistent cough that often sounds like your dog has something stuck in their throat. It can be dry and hoarse, or it may be productive, with your dog gagging or swallowing after coughing. Sometimes, it's

mistaken for a sound called “reverse sneezing,” a common occurrence in certain breeds, where dogs make a snorting noise due to throat irritation.

Are There Other Symptoms Besides the Cough?

In most cases, dogs with kennel cough seem healthy apart from the cough itself. However, some may show additional signs like sneezing, a runny nose, or watery eyes, though they typically keep their appetite and energy.

Is Kennel Cough Dangerous?

For most healthy dogs, kennel cough is more of an inconvenience than a serious illness, and it usually clears up without the need for treatment within a few weeks. However, in puppies, older dogs, or dogs with other health issues, kennel cough can lead to more severe conditions like pneumonia. Some strains of kennel cough can also be stronger than others, making the illness more serious.



How Do Dogs Catch Kennel Cough?

Kennel cough spreads easily through the air, which is why it’s common in places like kennels, where many dogs are housed together. It can also be spread by shared items, like toys or water bowls. A dog’s respiratory system is designed to fend off infections, but certain factors—like stress, cold weather, poor ventilation, or exposure to cigarette smoke—can make them more vulnerable.

The infection has an incubation period of 2 to 14 days, meaning your dog can show symptoms long after being exposed. In some cases, dogs can even carry the virus for months without showing signs.

How Is Kennel Cough Diagnosed?



There's no specific test for kennel cough, but if your dog has been around other dogs and starts coughing, it's often enough for your vet to make the diagnosis. Swabs can be taken to figure out the exact bacteria or virus causing the cough, though this isn't always necessary for treatment. If complications are suspected, like pneumonia, your vet may take X-rays to get a better look at your dog's lungs.

Should I Take My Dog to the Vet?

If your dog is otherwise healthy, eating, and acting normally, you might not need a vet visit. However, it's always a good idea to call for advice if you're worried. If you do visit the vet, let them know your dog is coughing so they can avoid putting other animals at risk. Keep your dog away from other dogs until they've recovered to help prevent the spread.



How Is Kennel Cough Treated?

Most dogs recover from kennel cough on their own within three weeks, though in some cases, it can take up to six weeks. To help your dog recover, keep your home well-ventilated, and avoid using a collar and lead during walks, as pulling can irritate the windpipe. A harness is a better option.

If your vet prescribes treatment, it might include antibiotics to tackle bacterial infections, cough suppressants to ease the coughing, or anti-inflammatories to reduce any throat irritation. These treatments can help make your dog more comfortable as they recover naturally.

Can My Dog Get Kennel Cough More Than Once?

Yes, dogs can catch kennel cough multiple times because it's caused by a variety of different strains of bacteria and viruses, similar to how humans can catch colds repeatedly. However, if your dog catches the **Bordetella bronchiseptica** strain, they typically gain immunity for 6 to 12 months.

Should I Vaccinate My Dog Against Kennel Cough?



Some of the infections that cause kennel cough are included in routine puppy vaccinations, including canine adenovirus type 2, canine parainfluenza, and canine distemper. The **Bordetella bronchiseptica** vaccine, which targets the most common bacteria in kennel cough cases, is available separately either through a nasal spray or injection.

While this vaccine won't completely prevent kennel cough, it can significantly reduce the severity of symptoms if your dog does catch it. The nasal vaccine can be given to puppies as young as three weeks old and typically provides protection for around a year. It takes about four days to become fully effective and is often required by boarding kennels to prevent the spread of the illness.

Conclusion

Kennel cough is highly contagious but usually mild, especially in healthy dogs. If your dog contracts kennel cough, rest assured they will likely recover on their own with a bit of extra care. However, always keep an eye on puppies, older dogs, or those with other health issues, as they may need extra attention to avoid complications. Vaccinating against kennel cough, especially if your dog is around other dogs frequently, is a great way to minimise their risk of catching or spreading the infection.