

Causes of Kennel Cough

Kennel cough is a complex disease that is caused by a number of infectious agents including canine parainfluenza virus, canine adenovirus 2, canine distemper virus, and a bacterium called *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. Other viruses and bacteria may also be involved, although their roles are less well understood. These viruses and bacteria can act alone or together to cause kennel cough.

Kennel Cough is a misleading name for this illness as dogs can be infected anywhere, not just in kennels. Usually, kennel cough is not serious, but some dogs can become seriously ill from kennel cough infection (especially very young, very old, or immunocompromised dogs). In any case, whenever a dog is coughing, a vet visit is highly recommended to sort out possible diagnoses and treatment options.

Signs of Kennel Cough (Common)

- Cough, usually a dry hacking cough (sometimes described as a goose honk cough). The severity and type of cough can be variable however.
- Retching and gagging (as if something stuck in throat) and expulsion of white foamy fluid.

Signs of Kennel Cough (More Serious)

- Nasal discharge
- Lethargy
- Loss of appetite

While a coughing dog should see a vet for evaluation, if lethargy or loss of appetite accompanies the cough, see your vet immediately as this may indicate serious complications such as pneumonia. The symptoms usually appear about 5-10 days after exposure to an infected dog, and can last for up to 3 weeks, though symptoms may improve considerably within a few days. It is thought that dogs can remain contagious for several weeks after symptoms clear up.



Diagnosis of kennel Cough

Uncomplicated cases of kennel cough can often be diagnosed based on history (i.e. exposure to new dogs), symptoms, and physical examination. If some of the more serious signs such as nasal discharge, lethargy, and loss of appetite are present, further testing such as blood counts and radiographs (x-rays) may be recommended.

Treatment of Kennel Cough

Treatment is based on the severity of illness in your dog. Many dogs recover without treatment, so your dog may simply require monitoring to ensure the symptoms are not worsening. For dogs with severe coughs, a cough suppressant may be prescribed, and in some cases, antibiotics may be prescribed to combat bacterial infections. If your dog has symptoms such as fever, lethargy and loss of appetite, more intensive treatment will be recommended.

Pressure from a collar can exacerbate kennel cough symptoms, so switching to a harness is recommended for the duration of the illness.

Prevention of Kennel Cough

An intranasal (administered in the nose) vaccine is available to protect against kennel cough. The vaccinations should be given at least 5 days in advance of situations where your dog is at risk for contracting kennel cough to be most effective. Most boarding facilities require vaccination against kennel cough (along with the routine annual vaccinations).

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