



DANADA VETERINARY HOSPITAL, P.C.

Kennel Cough In Dogs

Canine infectious tracheobronchitis, or “kennel cough,” is a highly contagious respiratory disorder. It is characterized by bouts of nonproductive (dry) coughing lasting from days to even weeks.

Contributing Factors

Kennel cough spreads rapidly between dogs housed in close proximity, such as a boarding kennel. Affected dogs usually have a history of recent boarding or some similar stressor, such as a trip to the groomer or a dog show.

Causes/Transmission

A number of different agents may be involved with kennel cough. The canine adeno-2 virus (CAV2), the parainfluenza virus (PIV), and the bacterium *Bordetella bronchiseptica* are the common primary pathogens (responsible for setting up the initial respiratory disease). Secondary invaders, such as *Mycoplasma*, become involved once an inflammatory process is present in the airway.

Clinical Signs

A dry, hacking cough is the hallmark of this disease. Many times, owners mistakenly believe that the dog is choking on a foreign body. Other than the cough, most dogs are still bright and alert with a good appetite. Fever and enlarged tonsils are occasionally found.

In rare cases, kennel cough can progress to a lower airway infection (pneumonia). When this occurs, dogs will develop a wet cough. Fever, lethargy, and loss of appetite are more common at this point.

Diagnosis

In most cases, the history and physical exam are adequate to provide a presumptive diagnosis of kennel cough. Rarely are specific diagnostic tests indicated, although they may be helpful in cases that are not resolving as expected. These additional tests might include a blood count and blood chemistries, chest x-rays, and a sample of fluid from the trachea (windpipe) or bronchi.

Treatment

Most animals will recover with rest alone, and do not require medications. Much like the common cold, kennel cough is usually a viral disease that will run its course in 10-14 days. If secondary symptoms of colored nasal discharge, congestion, or decreased appetite develop, antibiotics may help correct these signs. For dogs that cough continually, a mild cough suppressant can be prescribed. However, it is for short-term use only.

Dogs who are recovering from kennel cough should not be stressed with exercise or excitement for at least a week. Rest is recommended to avoid precipitation of the cough caused by increased activity. Dogs should remain isolated from other animals for at least one week after symptoms resolve.

Prognosis

The prognosis is usually excellent, and most cases resolve without complication. Infrequently, long-term respiratory problems can result from kennel cough.

Transmission to Humans

Canine infectious tracheobronchitis does not pose any health risk for humans.

Prevention

Vaccines are available to protect against the main infectious agents responsible for kennel cough. Bordetella vaccines are given intranasally (drops in the nose) because this route produces rapid immunity. Sometimes the intranasal vaccine can lead to a mild cough.

Because the immunity offered is neither 100% protective nor permanent, boosters are needed on a periodic basis. These are especially important before a dog is placed into a kennel situation; many kennels require these boosters before allowing a dog to enter the facility.