

Factsheet – Canine Cough

One of the public relations problems for boarding kennels today is caused by a commonly misunderstood disease called “canine cough”, tracheobronchitis, or “para-influenza”. As a dog owner you should be aware of some of the facts regarding this disease.

What is canine cough?

Infectious tracheobronchitis is a highly contagious upper-respiratory disease which is spread by an airborne virus. The incubation period of the disease is roughly 3-7 days. The main symptom is a gagging cough, sometimes accompanied by sneezing and nasal discharge, which can last anywhere from a few days to several weeks. Although this coughing is very annoying, it does not usually develop into anything more serious. However, just as with the common cold seen in humans, it can lower the dog’s resistance to other diseases making him/her susceptible to secondary infections. He/she must therefore be observed closely to avoid complications, and if symptoms become worse consult your Veterinarian.

How is it cured?

Just as in the case of the common cold, tracheobronchitis is not “cured”, but must run its course. Antibiotics will often be prescribed to prevent secondary infection, and sometimes cough suppressants will be prescribed to reduce excessive coughing, but these medications will not cure the disease.

Does tracheobronchitis only occur in kennels?

No. Since these viruses can be present anywhere and can travel considerable distances through the air, they can affect any dog, even one which never leaves its own back yard. However, tracheobronchitis is more likely to occur where the concentration of dogs is greater such as at dog shows, kennels, veterinary offices and hospitals, pet shops, dog parks, or dog classes. Dogs can also be exposed while running loose in your area or while being walked near other dogs.

In kennels, dogs are in close contact with each other, and can be feeling highly stimulated and perhaps a little stressed from being away from their home environment. These factors can result in a lower resistance to the disease. If your pet dog is exposed to other dogs regularly (such as regular doggie daycare, pet resort stays, dog park visits etc), then your dog is more likely to acquire immunity to the disease. It is important to note that even during a widespread outbreak, only a relatively small percentage of dogs are affected.

Are the viruses a constant problem?

No. Tracheobronchitis, like the flu, is often seasonal. It also tends to be epidemic. When veterinarians begin to see cases, they normally come from every pet related business or activity in the area, as well as from individual dog owners whose dogs are not socialised at all. When the outbreak is over, they might not see another case for months.

Can my dog be vaccinated to protect him against tracheobronchitis?

Yes! Vaccines against parainfluenza and adenovirus type 2 (in combination with other vaccines) are routinely used as part of an adult dog's yearly check up. Puppies are usually vaccinated for these in combination with distemper, hepatitis and parvovirus in a series of immunisations. It is important to note that the vaccines that are used to prevent this viral disease are made from one strain of more than 100 different strains of the virus and therefore are not as effective against some strains as others are. Intra-nasal vaccines are also available for Bordetella Bronchloseptica (another cause of canine cough). Although some veterinary practices do not use this intra-nasal vaccination routinely, it should be considered for pets that board or for those whose veterinarian recommends it. Your veterinarian is in the best position to recommend a program of preventative health care management depending on your pet's needs.

Can the kennel prevent my dog from catching tracheobronchitis?

Unfortunately, no amount of supervision, sanitation, or personalised care can prevent a dog from "catching" an airborne virus. Just as your child's school has no way of preventing a flu outbreak, a pet boarding facility has no way of preventing Canine Cough. Schools, hotels, and pet boarding facilities alike cannot be held responsible for any virus outbreak. Instead, a good boarding facility will recommend immunisation against tracheobronchitis, refuse to board any obviously sick dog, listen and watch for any signs of sickness (strangely, the dog with parainfluenza alone may not appear ill, yet is already contagious), and make sure that any dog requiring veterinary attention receives it as quickly as possible. The pet owner is financially responsible for such care.

What should you do if you dog is diagnosed with Canine Cough?

If your dog is diagnosed with canine cough, you must keep your dog at home and ensure that they do not have contact with any other dog outside of you household. Additionally, if your pet is booked to go to a boarding facility, it is essential that you do not take them if they are unwell or have been diagnosed with Canine Cough, as it presents a high risk for your pet spreading the virus to other pets in the facility.

One of the biggest challenges faced in high risk areas and activities such as dog parks, boarding facilities, doggie day care centres, dog training classes, pet sitters or vet surgeries is that the dogs spreading the virus are often not showing symptoms at the time that they are contagious. This makes it difficult to determine which dogs are contagious, and also means that it is impossible to know if a pet is carrying the virus and not yet symptomatic. The risk is therefore always present any time your dog is in the vicinity of other pets.

Summary of Points:

Canine Cough is one of the most common respiratory diseases in dogs. It is often incorrectly referred to as “Kennel Cough”, although it can be transmitted anywhere that dogs gather, and even in your own home from dogs passing by your yard who are infected.

The term Kennel Cough used incorrectly is now considered to be factually wrong and has resulted in litigation against users of the term. This virus is not caused or related to a Kennel, it is a virus that can be contracted in countless places.

No amount of supervision, sanitization, or personalised care can prevent a dog from “catching” an airborne virus such as Canine Cough.

The best defense to protect your pet is to ensure that they are fully vaccinated and receive their booster vaccine every year.

For more information, contact the Pet Industry Association of Australia anytime by emailing us at info@paa.net.au

Further Factsheets can be found in the public resources tab at <https://www.paa.net.au>
