

Canine Cough

By Diane Jarvis

As you take your dog on his daily walk, you notice that each time he pulls on the leash he coughs. After you get home, he is still hacking and coughing, and acts as though he is gagging. After a day of this you call the vet and take Fido in for a check-up, and to your surprise the vet diagnoses infectious tracheobronchitis – usually called kennel cough.

One of the most common afflictions among our canine friends, infectious tracheobronchitis is caused by certain viruses and bacteria working together. Bordetella bronchiseptica is usually involved, accompanied by the reovirus, adenovirus, or parainfluenza virus.

The term kennel cough has been widely used for many years. This is because it is usually seen in dogs that have been in shelters, pet shops, boarding kennels, grooming facilities, veterinary hospitals or research facilities where they are in the company of other dogs. Recently, there has been a movement to use the term canine cough in order to disassociate it with kennels. The American Boarding Kennels Association is hoping the term “canine cough” will catch on, since it is a more accurate description.

Much like the human cold, the disease is likely to occur in a populated, enclosed environment where a single source can infect everyone with a sneeze or cough. The airborne organisms are carried in the air in microscopically tiny water vapor or dust particles.

Even in clean, well-ventilated facilities it is nearly impossible to guarantee that there is no chance of infection. A trip to the vet, a day at the bark park, or a friendly exchange on your daily walk can expose your dog to airborne viruses. Dogs with canine cough may take four to ten days to show any symptoms; and in most cases it is just the dry, unproductive cough. For the most part, dogs will not act sick – their energy levels and appetite remain the same – so it may take several days for you to realize that Fido’s coughing is a problem.

When you do take your dog to your veterinarian, the doctor will ask for a thorough history of where your dog has been and where he may have contracted the cough. That, with an exam that includes putting gentle pressure on the dog’s trachea to induce coughing, is usually sufficient to diagnose canine cough. The course of treatment may include antibiotics to prevent secondary infections, an anti-inflammatory to reduce inflammation and possibly a cough suppressant. Persistent coughing can be distressing to both dog and guardian, and in some cases can be so severe as to damage the respiratory tract.

The good news is that, in nearly all cases, canine cough is a mild disease. Even without treatment it usually goes away on its own. The key is to make sure your dog doesn’t pass it on to other dogs. It may become serious in young puppies, especially those with a

recent shipping history (i.e. pet store puppies), due to the stress and exposure to new dogs. In this case it may progress to pneumonia and must be closely monitored.

Prevention is always the best way to protect your dog. The annual 5-in-1 vaccine that your dog receives protects against parainfluenza virus and Adenovirus type II. An additional vaccine to protect against Bordatella bronchiseptica is recommended if your dog may come in contact with other dogs. This means if your dog goes to a groomer, a bark park, a boarding kennel, or the vet's office he stands a much better chance of staying healthy.

There are two ways to vaccinate for Bordatella – injection or intranasal. Your vet can advise you as to the best option for your particular dog. The injectable vaccine must be given in two doses after four months of age, and needs an annual booster. It may only lead to less severe infection and not complete protection. The intranasal vaccine may be given as early as two weeks of age, and protects for 10 to 12 months. The intranasal vaccine takes about four days to become effective, so plan to have your dog vaccinated at least a week before exposure. It is considered to be the more effective of the two, since it is sprayed into the dog's nose and actually protects the “entry point” of the airborne viruses.

Having your dog fully vaccinated from the time he's a puppy and being examined by a vet regularly is the key to having a healthy dog!