



What is Kennel Cough?

Canine infectious tracheobronchitis (ITB), also known as Kennel Cough, is generally a complex combination of infections that are both viral and bacterial in origin and cause inflammation of the respiratory tract. The most common infectious agents include canine parainfluenza virus, canine adenovirus 2, canine influenza, Bordetella bronchiseptica, and Mycoplasma species. It is similar to a chest cold in humans and is highly contagious amongst dogs. These organisms are spread through the air and via close contact with contaminated surfaces (like cages, food bowls and caretaker clothing). Clinical signs often follow exposure to other infected dogs at kennels, dog parks and dog shows.

Who is at risk?

Dogs that have frequent contact with other dogs, especially in a kennel situation are most at risk for developing ITB. However, unvaccinated, young, and immune-compromised dogs are also at risk.

What are the clinical signs?

The classic ITB sign is a hacking (“goose honk”) cough that occurs in spasms when the dog is excited, during high activity, or when pressure is on the neck (such as when a dog is pulling against its collar). Sometimes the cough can be productive and he might gag and cough up white, foamy phlegm. Unless the infection is complicated or severe, the dog generally feels well otherwise, with a good appetite and energy level. Other signs like nasal discharge, fever, decreased appetite, lethargy, and respiratory difficulty indicate a more severe infection, or progression of the infection to pneumonia. Unvaccinated and young dogs are most at risk for more severe infections.

How is Kennel Cough diagnosed?

ITB is often diagnosed from clinical signs, history of recent exposure to other dogs, and physical exam. Blood work is often normal unless a more complicated infection is present. Radiographs (X-rays), blood work and sometimes a tracheal wash (collecting fluid samples from the airway) are indicated in more severe infections or to help rule out other disease processes.

How is Kennel Cough treated?

First and foremost, isolate your dog from other dogs if you suspect that he has ITB. It’s always a good idea to see your veterinarian if your dog is coughing. Treatment for routine cases of ITB generally consists of supportive care with cough suppression and nebulization. (Cough suppressants are not recommended in cases that are more complicated or productive.) Providing a humidifier, or taking your dog into the bathroom while you shower for 15 minutes, can help to ease breathing, loosen respiratory secretions, and soothe irritated breathing passages. More severe cases may require antibiotics or hospitalization for oxygen, intravenous fluids, and intravenous antibiotics.

How is Kennel Cough prevented?

The best way to prevent ITB is to prevent exposure. However, vaccinations are available for several of the ITB agents, including parainfluenza, Bordetella, and adenovirus 2. Ask your primary care veterinarian for further information about whether or not these vaccines are recommended for your dog.

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Kennel cough is highly contagious. It is spread through the air and often affects dogs who have spent time in kennels, at dog parks, or in dog shows.



What is the prognosis for Kennel Cough?

For most dogs, the prognosis for ITB is very good and the infection will run its course often without antibiotics over a three-week time frame. Young and immune-compromised animals may take longer to recover. The prognosis for dogs that have more severe infections (e.g. pneumonia) depends on response to therapy and other complicating conditions.

What should be done while my dog has Kennel Cough?

It is very important to isolate your dog if you suspect that he has ITB. He should be isolated throughout the time that he is showing clinical signs. You should disinfect all items (crates, bowls, floors, etc.) that have come in contact with the dog with a solution of diluted bleach in water (1:32). Your dog should be showing improvement in his signs within one week of starting treatment. Seek out additional veterinary care if you have any concerns about worsening clinical signs (difficulty breathing, nasal discharge, decreased appetite, lethargy) or the length of time associated with the signs.