



Kennel Cough, or Infectious Tracheobronchitis

What is Kennel Cough?

Kennel Cough refers to a very contagious infection of the upper airway, and can affect dogs of all ages. The disease is caused by a mixture of viruses and bacteria which can pass readily from dog to dog via droplets or from contaminated surfaces. For example your dog could become infected by sniffing somewhere where an infected dog may have recently coughed. Often a virus is inhaled and causes inflammation and damage to the cells lining your dog's upper airway. The damage caused then allows bacteria to invade and these can paralyse the little hairs lining your dog's airway. These hairs normally help stop dust and mucus from entering the lungs, but when not working, these predispose your pet to developing further problems lower down the airway, such as pneumonia.

What will my dog do if he has Kennel Cough?

If your dog is unfortunate enough to get 'Kennel Cough', then the first thing you will probably see is a dry, harsh cough, possibly with a retch at the end that may result in him bringing up some frothy fluid or saliva. It normally takes about 5 days from exposure before your dog will start to cough. The cough can become so severe that it can sound as if your dog is choking, and can be very distressing for both pet and family members. Unfortunately the more your dog coughs, the more damage that will occur to the airway and in severe cases, the infection will be able to reach the lungs and cause a pneumonia. Once your dog is coughing, it is therefore important not to do anything to make it worse – so avoid excitement, pulling on the lead, barking and exercise, especially in cool morning air.

Depending on how severe the infection is, your dog may also become lethargic, have a reduced appetite, have a fever, and develop a runny nose and/or eyes – all similar to the symptoms that people may have with 'flu' or 'whooping cough'.

If your dog does develop Kennel Cough, it is important not to take him or her out where other dogs are walked until the coughing has stopped completely which can take a number of weeks.

Why do I need to visit the Vet?

Kennel cough is a common cause of coughing in dogs, but not all coughing dogs have Kennel Cough!! The important thing to do would be to take him to your vet so a diagnosis can be made and appropriate treatment given.

Your Vet will examine your dog and pay particular attention to listening to his/her heart and lungs, along with doing a 'tracheal pinch' test which involves gently feeling your dog's windpipe and seeing if it causes a cough. In this situation, provided your pet's heart and



lungs sound normal, a reaction to the 'tracheal pinch test' would suggest inflammation of the upper respiratory tract, which makes a diagnosis of Kennel Cough more likely.

If your vet suspects your dog has Kennel Cough, he/she will be able to provide medications to make your dog feel much better, reduce airway inflammation and reduce further damage. Depending on the symptoms, he/she may also require antibiotics for the bacterial part of the disease. However, as we know with ourselves, any viral part must be left to be dealt with by the body's own immune system.

When you arrive at the surgery, it is advisable to leave your dog in the car until the Vet is ready to see you as this will help reduce spreading the disease to any other dogs already waiting in the surgery.

Can I stop my dog getting Kennel Cough?

Yes. The good news is that you can protect your canine friend with vaccination. By vaccinating your dog against the commonest bacterial and viral components of 'Kennel Cough', you can be much more confident about taking him for walks where he/she may come into contact with other dogs, safe in the knowledge you have protected him as much as you can against this potentially nasty disease. You will also be able to relax if you take your dog to county shows, or training classes, or need to put into kennels when going away.

The vaccine differs from your dog's usual annual vaccine in that it is dribbled into a nostril! This allows your dog to develop immunity right where he or she needs it most – where the viruses and bacteria are going to cause disease first in the nasal passages. It does not involve any needles near your dog's nose – instead a soft nozzle is placed on the syringe instead of a needle and this is then placed close to one of your dog's nostrils and a small amount of liquid is then dribbled in. Most dogs will tolerate this surprisingly well, and tasty treats are often all that are needed as a distraction.

As with all vaccinations, similar to our 'flu vaccine, there are occasional pets who, although being vaccinated, might still develop 'Kennel Cough' if heavily exposed. In such situations however, they should only develop mild clinical signs, if any.

Remember to ask your vet about the Kennel Cough vaccine. Some practices will offer this as an optional extra (at an additional fee) but here at Chestnut Vets we include the Kennel Cough vaccination in our standard vaccine protocol for all dogs, at no extra cost. If you are requesting the Kennel Cough vaccine prior to going on holiday, then do remember that many kennels require the vaccine to be given at least 2 weeks before boarding to give their immune system time to respond to the vaccination. It is also important that your dog does not receive any antibiotics for at least a week after vaccination as these would not only treat your dog for whatever condition he may be suffering from but would actually 'kill off' the vaccine before it had chance to work!



So, Kennel Cough is a common and infectious cause of coughing in dogs, but not all coughing dogs will automatically have Kennel Cough. If you suspect your dog has Kennel Cough, then check this out with your vet. Follow your Vet's instructions carefully, give the complete course of any medication prescribed and remember to keep your dog away from others until he has stopped coughing completely. Try to reduce triggers of coughing such as those causing excitement, barking and pulling on the lead and your dog will soon be back to his normal self.

For more information about Kennel Cough, and about vaccinations, then don't hesitate to contact us at the Chestnut Vets