

HEALTH RESEARCH SUBCOMMITTEE

Our thanks go to Sandra and Greg Parkes who have obtained the following article on Canine Cough from Mr. Brian Garrett, B.V.Sc., M.R.C.V.S., of the Belmont Veterinary Hospital.

We are most grateful to Mr. Garrett for writing this article for us and for his permission to reprint the article in Harking In.

CANINE COUGH



Kennel cough is a common name given to any harsh cough in dogs. However as there are a number of infectious agents that can cause this type of cough and the dog does not need to go to a kennel to get it, a better name would be Canine cough. The medical name is Infectious Canine Tracheobronchitis syndrome.

Canine cough is most frequently caused by a bacteria called Bordatella bronchiseptica, and viruses called canine parainfluenza, and canine adenovirus type 2. Other viruses are suspected to be able to cause disease, and many other bacteria can become secondary invaders when the dogs' respiratory system has been damaged by one of the viruses. Cases where a number of viruses and bacteria are involved are often worse than if only one pathogen is present. The dog will show symptoms of "Kennel Cough" with parainfluenza infection OR Bordatella infection OR adenovirus infection, but will be coughing worse for longer if both Bordatella and adenovirus are present.

Canine cough is infectious, and spread by aerosol (i.e. dog coughing puts bugs in air to be breathed in by other dog). Aerosol spread means that direct contact between dogs is not necessary, although any situation where large numbers of dogs are close together is going to make spread easier. This is where the Kennel Cough name has come from because the kennel environment (especially in RSPCA shelters where many animals are immunosuppressed due to other disease or injury) supports the transmission of aerosol viruses and bacteria. Dog shows, grooming parlours, veterinary hospitals, obedience schools, and popular dog parks are other common places for exposure to occur.

Once exposed to one or more of these bacteria/viruses there is usually an incubation period of 5-10 days before any symptoms are seen. The classic symptom is a harsh hacking cough, often as though trying to bring something up. Sometimes white froth will be coughed up. The cough is often made worse by activity and pulling on a lead and occurs as fits of repeated coughing followed by reasonably normal behaviour. Usually the dog is reasonably well wanting to eat go for walks etc as normal, if the dog is unwell then a secondary bacterial infection may be present or there may be another problem. Diagnosis of Canine cough is usually by assessment of the symptoms and basic physical examination. Further tests are usually only necessary if other underlying disease is suspected or if response to treatment is poor.

Most cases of Canine cough are self limiting, just like colds in people, and really just need rest and plenty of TLC. Recovery may take 10-14 days. Some cases may benefit from antibiotics and cough suppressants, and if the dog is very sick, or symptoms persist for longer than 2 weeks then further investigation such as chest x-rays, blood tests or tracheal endoscopy may be warranted. If I see a dog with Canine cough I will usually treat them with antibiotics as there is one bacteria known to be involved, and there have been cases where other bacteria have caused more serious infections such as pneumonia when the Canine cough has lowered a dog's immunity.

Prevention of spread of these bacteria/viruses that cause Canine cough is important. If your dog is coughing don't take it to places where other dogs are (if you are going to the vets then wait in the car or in a separate room rather than the waiting room where all other dogs will be exposed).

Vaccinate your dog. There are vaccines available against "Kennel cough" which should be incorporated into your dog's annual vaccination routine. The Kennel cough vaccine usually protects against Parainfluenza and Bordatella but is not complete protection due to the multitude of bacteria and viruses involved. Despite this incomplete protection, the vaccine can prevent disease by blocking transmission of the commonest causes and will decrease severity and length of illness in cases where other viruses are involved. There is an intranasal vaccine (drops in the dog's nose) available which provides good immunity within 5 days, or an injectable vaccine which needs 2 doses within 4 weeks to start and then an annual booster to maintain immunity.

