

KENNEL COUGH: FACTSHEET

What is kennel (or canine) cough?

It's a very common infectious respiratory disease for dogs and spreads easily. It can spread from direct contact between dogs (sneezing, 'mouthing', playing in close contact) and also indirect contact (park grass, communal water bowls, even the footpath outside your house).

What does it sound like?

A harsh, honking cough with a retch at the end, as if the dog needs to clear its throat. Sometimes dogs bring up spittle which is respiratory secretion (not to be confused with vomit). Coughing starts 3-7 days after initial infection and is triggered by excitement or exercise.

What should I expect? What should I do?

Most dogs will cough frequently throughout the day but will usually still be bright and alert. They have a normal appetite and no fever.

Kennel cough lasts from one to three weeks and your dog must be isolated during this time. Infected dogs will often spread the disease before they have even started coughing. They can also spread it for days to weeks after they are recovered. Therefore, it is very important to isolate your dog until it has completely stopped coughing.

Usually, they will clear the disease on their own in 7-10 days without any medication. It's recommended to avoid strenuous exercise during this time as this can aggravate the respiratory tract. Good general hygiene practices should be practised to avoid spreading the disease to other dogs.

Treatment is symptomatic relief with cough suppressant medication. Antibiotics are only used if there is a secondary bacterial infection. Symptoms of this include fever, lethargy or loss of appetite.

How can I prevent kennel cough?

Many dogs socialise frequently with each other: at the beach, park or doggy daycare. This means that we commonly see kennel cough in our pets. The best form of prevention is annual C5 vaccination. Because there are new strains of kennel cough in dogs each year it's important to stay on top of your dog's vaccinations. However, there is still a chance they may get a mild form of the disease if the strain is different from the one used in the vaccine.

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