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Kennel Cough in Dogs



Infectious Canine Tracheobronchitis

Kennel cough, the common name that is given to infectious canine tracheobronchitis, is a very highly contagious respiratory disease among dogs. As the name of the disease suggests, it is typified by inflammation of the *trachea* and bronchi. This disease is found throughout the world and is known to infect a very high percentage of dogs at least once during their lifetime. It is also medically referred to as tracheobronchitis and *Bordetella*.

Young puppies can suffer the most severe complications that can result from this disease, since they have an underdeveloped immune system. Dogs with increased risk are older dogs, which have lowered immunity, and bitches, which also have lowered immunity. Also at increased risk are dogs that are stressed and pregnant.

Symptoms

- Dry hacking cough is the most common symptom
- Cough may sound like honking
- Retching
- Watery nasal discharge
- In mild cases, dogs would likely have a runny nose
- In severe cases, symptoms progress to *lethargy* and even death
- Unvaccinated puppies and young dogs experience the most severe symptoms



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Causes

Most of the time there has been a recent boarding that has placed the dog in contact with a number of other dogs.

Some of the most common causes that contribute to the infectious canine tracheobronchitis disease are *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, parainfluenza virus, and mycoplasma. Apart from the canine herpes virus, reovirus and the canine adenovirus can also cause this disease. As any one of these organisms can cause the symptoms of this disease, in most of the cases, the result of the disease is thought to be more than one organism combined. However, the most common and important organism that causes tracheobronchitis is the parainfluenza virus. This particular virus causes gentle symptoms that last less than a week, unless there is an involvement with other bacteria.

The *Bordetella bronchiseptica* is also a common type of bacteria that is often isolated from this disorder. According to the clinical signs the visible onset of infection usually occurs three to four days after initial exposure, but when it is combined with other organisms – such as a combination parainfluenza-bordetella infection – the symptoms may last for up to three weeks.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis for this disease is largely based upon the type of symptoms that are being presented and your dog's history with regards to exposure to other dogs. You will need to give a thorough history of your dog's health and onset of symptoms. A complete blood profile will be conducted, including a chemical blood profile, a complete blood count, and a *urinalysis*. These blood tests, along with viral isolation and bacterial cultures, will be performed in order to verify individual agents that are causing the kennel cough.

Treatment

Depending on the severity of the infection and the severity of the symptoms, there are two main types of treatments that can be given for canine tracheobronchitis disease. In the most common and uncomplicated type of disease, there is generally no need for antibiotics.

If your dog is alert, but has only minor symptoms along with the recurrent cough, then it is often left alone to go through the course of the disease, just like the common cold in humans. Most of the time an anti-inflammatory agent will be given to your dog in order to reduce the severity and frequency of coughing episodes and to make the dog more comfortable. Antibiotics will be used if your dog is not eating, is running a fever, and is showing signs of severe respiratory troubles, as this may indicate pneumonia.

While your dog is recovering from the infection, allow it to breath without anything that might irritate or constrict its throat – such as collars or scarves/bandannas. For walks and outings, you can substitute the collar with a **body harness**.

Living and Management

In order to prevent this disease, it is recommended that you not expose your dog to kennel like or boarding conditions, where large populations of dogs are contained and mixed together. However, if you cannot avoid this, then a proper vaccination would be the best option. Talk to your veterinarian about what is available for your dog, since there are certain vaccines that can have worrisome side effects. Therefore, vaccines to prevent tracheobronchitis are generally only given to dogs that are at high risk.

Even with precautions, a large number of dogs acquire this respiratory infection. It is best to be observant and prepared.

Although this infection usually does not cross over to humans, there are instances where young children and adults with compromised immune systems are at risk for infection. In these cases, care must be taken to protect those at risk from coming into contact with the sick dog until it has fully recovered. If contact cannot be avoided, extra care will need to be taken with hygiene.

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