Kennel cough in dogs

ADVICE FOR OWNERS
Infectious Canine Tracheobronchitis (Kennel Cough)

This information sheet is to supplement the information that has been discussed by the attending clinician or qualified member of staff.

What is kennel cough?
Kennel cough or Infectious Canine Tracheobronchitis is a highly contagious respiratory infection among dogs. This disease is known throughout the world and infects a high percentage of dogs. It is thought that it will affect most dogs at least once in its lifetime.

What are the signs to look out for?
• Dry hacking cough sometimes may sound like honking
• Retching
• Watery nasal discharge
• In mild cases most dogs are active and eating normally
• In severe cases symptoms can progress into decreased appetite, fever, lethargy pneumonia and sometimes even death

Unvaccinated, young, elderly or immunocompromised dogs might experience the most severe signs of the disease.

CAUSES
Kennel cough can be caused by a number of different agents including:
• Canine parainfluenza virus
• Canine adenovirus 2
• Canine distemper virus
• A bacteria called Bordetella bronchiseptica

There are also other viruses and bacteria that can cause this. They can act alone or sometimes together to cause kennel cough.

How is kennel cough transmitted?
Both viral and bacterial kennel cough are airborne, this is partly why it is so contagious. The coughing and sneezing of the affected dogs cause droplets containing the bacteria/virus to spread into the air which can then be inhaled by other dogs. The bacteria/virus may also live outside the body and can be found on toys, bowls etc. waiting for an unsuspecting dog to have a drink or play with a toy.

How do we diagnose kennel cough?
• A good clinical history is important and can usually diagnose kennel cough e.g. has your pet been in kennels, is there exposure to a new dog or has your pet been around a dog who has been diagnosed as having kennel cough?
• Symptoms and physical examination of the dog. If more serious signs are present further investigation may be required. Such as:
  - Blood samples
  - X-rays if there is severe nasal discharge or if breathing difficulties are present

Questions for my veterinarian:

Treatment options?
Treatment depends on the severity of clinical signs

Most dogs will recover without any treatment.

Monitoring of the signs will be put in place to check that the disease is not progressing and that your pet still has a good appetite and does not develop a fever.

Sometimes the use of antibiotics is required to combat the bacterial infection.

For the dogs with severe coughs the use of a cough suppressant is required.

Using a chest harness instead of a collar and lead is useful, especially if they pull on the lead.

Can we prevent kennel cough?
The most effective way to prevent the contraction of the disease is vaccination, this minimises your dog’s chances of contracting the disease.

Other steps to limit your dog’s exposure may include:
• Ensure your dog stays fit and healthy. Avoid stress and extreme increase in temperature. This will strengthen the immune system.
• Ensure your dog is kept in a well ventilated area and reduce the contact your dog has with strange dogs, especially in enclosed spaces.
• Avoid taking your dog to boarding kennels or large gatherings of dogs in enclosed spaces, unless the organisation has a kennel cough vaccination policy in place.

Although this disease does not usually cross over to humans there are instances where young children and adults who have compromised immune systems are at risk of infection. Therefore care must be taken not to allow the infected dog in contact with these people and good hygiene should be adhered too.