

Kennel Cough

“Kennel Cough”, infectious tracheobronchitis, is a highly contagious disease that is localized in the airways. It primarily affects dogs and is caused by one or more infectious agents including two viral agents, canine adenovirus and parainfluenza, as well as the bacterium, *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. The disease is always present in the canine population (endemic) and periodically flares up primarily in the fall/winter months when the air is cool and pets are confined indoors or in boarding facilities over the holidays. In the Fairbanks area it is rarely seen during the summer months but once it starts it will quickly make its rounds.

The disease is characterized by a harsh, hacking cough often described like “something stuck in the throat”. It is similar to a chest cold in humans and is usually self-limiting.

After exposure, the incubation period is 2-14 days and the cold persists for 2-3 weeks with the worst symptoms during the first 7-13 days; it is easily transmitted and highly infectious but seldom poses serious problems.

Due to the viral nature of the disease, antibiotic therapy is not highly effective in treating the disease but may be prescribed to reduce the potential of a secondary infection developing in the already weakened bronchial system.

Cough suppressants and low dose corticosteroids can help reduce the cough but should be used with caution since the coughing mechanism helps keep the lower airways clear of the fluid and if the cough is removed, the patient becomes susceptible to pneumonia.

Two vaccines, an oral product and an injectable agent, are available to provide protection. Ideally, they should be given two weeks before exposure and due to their short duration of immunity, they may need to have a booster at 4-6-month intervals. Preventative treatment or vaccinations are of no value if the patient has already been exposed and is incubating the disease.

Home care treatment with over-the-counter medications:

- Keep patient quiet during the initial signs; stress and excitement aggravate the irritated bronchial lining and worsen the cough.
- Cough suppressant/expectorant Dextromethorphan (Robitussin DM) at a dose of 1/2-1 mg/lb every 6-8 hours. Some dogs don't like the taste of the syrup, adding a tablespoon of honey makes it more palatable.
- Antihistamines; Chlorpheniramine (Chlor Trimeton), 24 mg every 6-8 hours or Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) 1mg/lb every 4-6 hours.