



Seger Park Dog Owners Association

Philadelphia, PA

www.segerdoarun.org

July, 2006

Does your Dog Have a Dry, Hacking Cough?

What is Kennel Cough?

Kennel cough complex describes both viral and bacterial components.

- The bacterial component is the most described in treatments since that is what will usually cause the most harm to dogs (*Bordetella bronchiseptica*).
- The vaccine is not 100% protective. I personally see it more like a flu vaccine, where you can still become infected, but the clinical signs should not be as severe had you not been vaccinated.
- It is contagious but dog parks are less likely to have it passed than dogs in kennel or daycare situations (longer exposures) although it would not be impossible to catch one of these infections at the dog park.
- Just because a dog (or human!) is treated with antibiotics does not mean they are no longer contagious. It can take months to fully rid the dog of infection.
- So long as the dog only has a dry hacking cough and is eating/drinking well, no vomit (other than the 'vomit' maybe at the end of a hacking cough episode), no diarrhea, and has good energy you can start conservatively at home while you wait to see your vet (should still see your vet especially if the cough does not subside or get better readily)

Preventing Kennel Cough

- Provide lots of fluids when walking and running around
- If you have dry indoor heat, also consider using a humidifier in the area the dog sleeps to keep the upper airways in good shape.

What Can I Do for My Coughing Dog?

- Humidifier in the area your dog is in the most during the day and especially where your dog sleeps at night.
- No running and limit walks (so the coughing dog should not be taken to dog parks not necessarily for the infectious component but really for the dog's own sake to spare the upper airways). Mimic how a panting dog breathes after running around and you can feel how quickly their upper airways can dry out and cause further damage.
- Offer more fluids, especially on walks (should do this at all times anyway).
- Wet down dry food with water to soften the dry food.
- All of these things are meant to spare the upper airways from further damage/drying out and help restore upper airway integrity.

When Should I Become More Concerned?

Watch for decreased appetite, energy, presence of vomiting, diarrhea, purulent (snotty) discharge from nose, eyes or lots of phlegm while coughing ('productive' cough).

More Information

- There are other reasons for coughing and you should see your vet to be sure there is no other reason to worry about the cough.*
- In order to better, more definitively diagnose Bordetella infection, for example, swabs and/or cultures of the upper airways need to be done.
- In most dry, hacking cough dogs with no other signs of illness, antibiotics are not needed and reserved for those dogs that really need it to help them get better. We may reach for antitussives (anti-cough), but try to hold off on using antibiotics unless really needed. Overuse of antibiotics can lead to resistance which is why most veterinarians will be very selective on what dogs they will empirically use antibiotics (of course if there is a productive cough or positive culture or other signs of illness present, antibiotics will probably be used).
- Radiographs (x-rays) may need to be done to be sure pneumonia is not present. Personally I reach for this modality if I hear any evidence of fluid in the lungs, if any other general signs of illness are present, and in some puppies.

Philosophy on some of these things will differ from vet to vet, but that's my take on it.

Hope that helps for now.

*Another source added that there are many mold and pollen allergens in the air this winter and some coughing dogs might be showing signs of allergies.

Big Thanks to Veterinarian Eric Matkowski for helping out the Seger Park Dog Owners Association with this information!!!