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Kennel Cough in Dogs

Canine infectious tracheobronchitis, or “kennel cough,” is an important respiratory disorder because it is highly contagious between dogs. A number of different infectious agents may be involved with this disease. It is characterized by bouts of nonproductive (dry) coughing lasting from days to even weeks.

Contributing Factors

Kennel cough spreads rapidly between dogs housed in close proximity, such as a boarding kennel. Affected dogs usually have a history of recent boarding or some similar stressor, such as a trip to the groomer or a dog show.

Some researchers report that there is an increased incidence of kennel cough in the fall.

Causes/Transmission

As noted above, a number of different agents may be involved with kennel cough. The canine adeno-2 virus (CAV2), the parainfluenza virus (PIV), and the bacterium *Bordetella bronchiseptica* are the common primary pathogens (responsible for setting up the initial respiratory disease). Secondary invaders, such as *Mycoplasma*, become involved once an inflammatory process is present in the airway.

Clinical Signs

A dry, hacking cough is the hallmark of this disease. Many times, owners mistakenly believe that the dog is choking on a foreign body. Other than the cough, most dogs are still bright and alert with a good appetite. Fever and enlarged tonsils are occasionally found.

Diagnosis

In most cases, the history and physical exam are adequate to provide a presumptive diagnosis of kennel cough. Rarely are specific diagnostic tests indicated, although they may be helpful in cases that are not resolving as expected. These additional tests might include a blood count and blood chemistries, chest x-rays, and a sample of fluid from the trachea (windpipe) or bronchi.

Treatment

Although antibiotic therapy can be helpful for the bacterial component of kennel cough, there is no specific therapy for the viruses. For dogs that cough continually, a mild cough suppressant can be prescribed. However, it is for short-term use only.

Dogs who are recovering from kennel cough should not be stressed with exercise or excitement for at least a week. Rest is recommended to avoid precipitation of the cough caused by increased activity.

Prognosis

The prognosis is usually good and, in most cases, has the potential to resolve without complication. Infrequently, long-term respiratory problems can result from kennel cough.

Transmission to Humans

Canine infectious tracheobronchitis does not pose any health risk for humans.

Prevention

Vaccines are available to protect against the main infectious agents responsible for kennel cough. Bordetella vaccines are given intranasal (drops in the nose) because this route produces rapid immunity. Sometimes the intranasal vaccine can lead to a mild cough.

Immunity against the two main viral diseases is covered with standard vaccine protocols (injection).

Because the immunity offered is neither 100% protective nor permanent, boosters are needed on a periodic basis. These are especially important before a dog is placed into a kennel situation; many kennels require these boosters before allowing a dog to enter the facility.