

So you've been a good caretaker of your dog this summer. You've managed to control flea and tick problems; you have dutifully avoided foxtail-laden fields; and you have kept your canine from overheating during the record breaking hot spell last month. Just when you thought it was safe to go out with your dog, Kennel Cough appears on the scene. I suspect most dog owners have heard of upper respiratory infection with the ill-conceived name of Kennel Cough. Since there has been some recent concern about kennel cough around town lately, I thought it appropriate to discuss it in this month's column

*Bordetella bronchiseptica* is the bacterium that is commonly associated with canine Kennel Cough. But unfortunately many different viral agents have been shown to cause Kennel Cough as well.

Without exception the dog with Kennel Cough presents to the veterinarian for coughing. The cough is usually quite loud and "goose honk-like", and is frequently associated with gagging or retching, as though they are trying to clear something from their throat. So while coughing is the principle symptom, some Kennel Cough patients come in with reports of vomiting and/or retching and gagging. The owner is often worried something is stuck in the dog's throat.

One interesting hallmark of canine Kennel Cough is that other than the cough and gag/retch, dogs with Kennel Cough usually feel fine. They're usually eating well, playful, active and other than their noisy cough they aren't acting sick. That said, some very young puppies with Kennel Cough may develop more serious disease. For the most part Kennel Cough patients just cough, gag and retch as they go on with their daily routine.

Diagnosis of Kennel Cough in dogs is made in the veterinary exam room based on the patient's symptoms, history and physical exam findings. Many dogs with Kennel Cough have recently been in an environment with other dogs such as a kennel, a dog show or a dog park etc. Bear in mind that not all dogs with Kennel Cough have this in their history. A fair number of patients I see each year have no history of recent exposure to other dogs. In these cases we believe the dog became infected through indirect means. Possibly the owner, or a friend or neighbor, unknowingly carried the infectious agent to the dog on their hands or clothing.

Kennel Cough is very contagious disease between dogs. This is why many veterinary hospitals (ours included) will have coughing patients wait in the owner's car before their exam. This helps reduce the chances of the Kennel Cough patient sharing the infection with other dogs in the waiting room. If one dog in a multi-dog household gets Kennel Cough, you can almost count on all the dogs getting it sooner or later. Some recent articles have implemented the *Bordetella* organism in some feline respiratory diseases as well.

Many veterinarians will treat Kennel Cough with antibiotics. This has merit because the *Bordetella* bacterium is a common cause of Kennel Cough. Keep in mind that viral agents cause some cases of Kennel Cough and these cases will not respond to antibiotics. They will recover from their illness, but it will just take longer compared to cases of bacterially caused Kennel Cough.

Vaccination can prevent most cases of Kennel Cough. Two types of vaccine are made, one given by injection under the skin (subcutaneously), the other is squirted in the dog's nose. We prefer the intra-nasal vaccine over the injectable type. The intra-nasal

vaccine seems to provide a more solid protection and it takes effect faster. No vaccine will prevent all cases of Kennel cough. The vaccines simply don't contain all the possible agents that can cause canine Kennel Cough. Also the protection doesn't last a long time so regular boosters are required. We encourage the Kennel Cough vaccine for those dogs at risk, or if the family wants to be extra cautious. "At risk" would be defined as lots of exposure to other dogs like at dog parks, shows, classes, shelters, etc.

Recently a number of dog owners have expressed concern that Vallejo's new dog park "has" Kennel Cough. We recently have seen a small increase in the number of dogs with Kennel Cough. Some of these dogs have been at the dog park others haven't. I hesitate to suggest that the park itself is the actual source or problem. Rather, I suspect the park is just where dogs congregate and share their infection. Remember, Kennel Cough can be spread anywhere that dogs have close contact. My advice to families who want to prevent a bout of Kennel cough in their dog: avoid social settings that include dogs of unknown health status, and get a vaccination to help shore up resistance to the infection.

Fortunately, Kennel Cough is usually treatable. With vaccination and common sense, most infections are preventable. With any luck your dog will avoid this annoying infection.

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