

Kennel Cough

What is Kennel Cough?

Kennel cough, also known as canine infectious tracheobronchitis, is a simple term frequently used to describe a complicated syndrome. However, this disease does not always manifest as coughing and it is not just limited to the trachea. A more accurate term for this syndrome is canine infectious respiratory disease complex (CIRDC).

CIRDC is similar to a common cold in people. It is commonly seen in dogs that have been exposed to a lot of other dogs, such as those in an animal shelter. Also, dogs in a shelter are stressed, causing their immune systems to be compromised.

CIRDC is usually mild and resolves in one to three weeks. The disease can be caused by a virus, a bacteria, or a combination of multiple organisms. Viral infections are not cured by antibiotics and, as with the common cold, there is no completely effective treatment. Treatment generally consists of supportive care and time to allow the dog's immune system to do its job. Antibiotics may be prescribed if a bacterial infection is suspected. Occasionally, veterinarians may prescribe other medications to control excessive coughing or other address other symptoms.

In rare cases, CIRDC can lead to serious disease, such as pneumonia. Sick dogs can also become dehydrated if they are not eating or drinking adequately. In such cases, hospitalization may be needed.

How contagious is Kennel Cough?

CIRDC is contagious to other dogs. Many dogs are vaccinated for kennel cough, especially if they have frequent contact with other dogs, such as during boarding, grooming, or competitions. However, the vaccine is not 100% protective so it is a good idea to isolate dogs that are showing signs of the disease and to wash your hands after handling sick dogs. In general, we recommend isolating all new arrivals in your household for 7-10 days after adoption to give them a chance to settle in and to make sure they are not harboring an infectious disease.

One cause of CIRDC, *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, can be contracted by other pets, such as cats and rabbits and rarely can infect a severely immunocompromised person (for example – a person with AIDS or undergoing chemotherapy). If someone in your family is immunocompromised, please contact your physician prior to adopting a new pet.

What are the signs of Kennel Cough?

Coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, ocular discharge, fever, difficulty breathing, decreased appetite, and decreased energy.

When should you contact your veterinarian?

It is very important that you take your new pet to a veterinarian for a complete examination within 3 days of adoption (consult your adoption contract and associated adoption policies).

With rest and good care, many dogs will recover from CIRDC in one to two weeks. Supportive care at home would include offering plenty of fresh water and food (canned food may help keep your dog hydrated), providing a nice quiet place for your dog to rest away from children or other pets, gently wiping away any discharge from the eyes or nose with a soft cloth moistened with warm water, or using a room humidifier in the area where your dog spends the most time. Limiting exercise, replacing a collar with a harness, and preventing contact with irritants such as dust, fumes, or smoke will reduce airway irritation and can help control coughing.

However, some dogs may require additional support. Please contact your veterinarian if your dog has any of the following signs: yellow or green discharge from the nose or eyes, excessive coughing, difficulty breathing, not eating for more than 24 hours, significant decrease in activity, or no improvement after one week of home care.