

## **Canine Cough**

Is your dog clearing his throat to tell you something? While it's possibly something as benign as an errant hair tickling the back of his throat, a persistent, dry hacking cough could be the first symptom of an upper respiratory infection commonly known as canine cough. Though highly contagious between dogs, preventative measures and treatments are plentiful to avert this vexing disease.

### **What is Canine Cough?**

Canine cough, infectious canine tracheobronchitis, kennel cough and Bordetella are all names given to a condition that is not entirely unlike the human cold. Canine cough is a common upper respiratory disease in dogs caused by one or more airborne infectious agents that irritate the interior of your dog's throat. (The lining of the throat sometimes suffers superficial damage, making it sensitive to the passage of air or food. This will typically heal once the disease is no longer present in the body.) The primary sources are parainfluenza, Bordetella bronchiseptica and mycoplasma, but other agents like canine adenovirus, reovirus and canine herpes are possible suspects as well. Whatever the cause, symptoms will usually show themselves within three to seven days after the initial exposure and last about ten days to three weeks. Your dog can then continue to carry the offending bacteria or virus for up to fourteen weeks, making him contagious to other dogs even after he is completely recovered.

Though the name "kennel cough" is one of the most commonly heard terms for this disease, your dog can catch it from any location where dogs are congregated for any amount of time, including boarding or breeding kennels, grooming shops, dog parks, animal hospitals, dog shows, even between fenced yards. The disease causing agents are airborne, but your dog needs relatively close contact with an infected dog or an item that an infected dog has had contact with, like a toy or water bowl. The disease does not survive long outside of the body, but thoroughly disinfecting shared items or housing and washing your hands is good practice to help prevent spreading.

### **What are the Symptoms of Canine Cough?**

As stated above, symptoms will generally begin to show themselves about three to seven days after exposure. The most notable symptom that also gives the disease its common name is coughing. Infected dogs will develop a cough with a dry hacking sound, almost

like they need to clear their throat. The coughing usually goes on every few minutes all day long and is sometimes accompanied by gagging, sneezing or a watery discharge from the nose. An elevated temperature is not typically present. Most dogs continue to be alert and active with a healthy appetite, but care should be taken in the amount of physical stimulation an infected dog receives so as not to further trigger throat irritation and coughing. The presence of these symptoms should warrant an exam by your veterinarian. Canine cough can progress to more severe symptoms in dogs whose immune systems are not working as they should be or are compromised by other ailments, or in unvaccinated puppies. Some of these might include lack of appetite, listlessness, fever, and pneumonia. Almost all dogs that contract canine cough have recently been in close proximity with other dogs.

### **How is Canine Cough Treated?**

The diagnosis and treatment of canine cough depends on the severity of the symptoms and should only be determined after an exam by your veterinarian. In an otherwise healthy and alert dog, medication is often not required and the disease is allowed to run its course. Antibiotics can be prescribed if there is a possibility of complications from secondary infections, but this does not necessarily lessen the amount of time that your dog is ill or contagious. Over-the-counter or prescription cough suppressants may also be utilized to lessen the severity of the cough and to make your dog more comfortable. You will be able to continue to feed your dog as you normally would, but exercise should be curtailed until he has a clean bill of health. Vigorous play or exercise will make your dog breathe harder, which further irritates his throat and encourages more coughing. A dog that has already had canine cough is usually more resistant to contracting it again, or the symptoms are generally less severe than during the first occurrence.

### **How do I Prevent Canine Cough?**

The surest way to prevent your dog from contracting canine cough is to not allow contact with other dogs, though this is not a possible option for most people. The next best thing is to have your dog vaccinated annually. The standard five-way vaccination, DHLPP, will provide protection against one of the most common infecting agents of the disease, parainfluenza. An intranasal vaccine specifically for canine cough is also available that goes directly to the area that needs the most safeguarding: the nasal passage and throat

since this is how the disease enters the body. Some dogs will display mild signs of canine cough after receiving the vaccination, but these will typically subside within a few days. Though the majority of boarding, training and grooming facilities require proof of canine cough vaccination, it is not always included with annual vaccines so you will most likely have to specifically ask that it be given at that time. Otherwise, if you plan to only vaccinate for canine cough when you need to, arrange to have the vaccination given at least four days prior to his being in contact with other dogs. This will allow the vaccine to develop full protection before possible exposure. The intranasal vaccine is effective for between six months to one year. It should be noted that as with any vaccination, it is still possible for your dog to contract the disease after he has been inoculated.

Dog professionals can help prevent the spread of canine cough within their facility by maintaining it at the utmost of cleanliness. Disinfection of housing, toys and food and water bowls should be done at least on a daily basis, as well as in between uses, and those who handle the dogs should wash their hands between dogs. Dogs of questionable health must be fully segregated from the general population to prevent healthy dogs from becoming exposed or infected. Indoor buildings should have good ventilation with air exchanges done multiple times an hour. Dogs coming into the facility should be required to show proof of current vaccinations, including canine cough. Even with all precautions diligently followed, canine cough is still possible to be spread in the cleanest of facilities.

### **Combating the Cough at Starmark Animal Behavior Center**

Here at Starmark Animal Behavior Center we are concerned with the health of each dog that comes through our doors. High barrier walls separate our indoor/outdoor runs to help prevent close contact between boarding dogs and both portions are disinfected each day with an antibacterial, antiviral cleanser. Shared toys in our activity areas, as well as food and water bowls are also disinfected daily. Our kennel buildings are equipped with hepa-filters and exhaust fans to provide regular air exchanges throughout the day.

Disinfecting hand cleanser dispensers enable kennel employees and trainers to easily disinfect their hands between handling dogs. All dogs boarding with us are taken to their activities separately and have private runs that will not be shared with another dog unless it is requested by the owner and they are from the same household. Our kennel technicians perform routine health checks throughout the day to ensure the state of well

Starmark Animal Behavior Center, Inc

being for all boarding dogs. All dogs entering our kennels are required to show proof of current Rabies, DHLPP and Bordetella vaccines. Starmark Animal Behavior Center has the Bordetella vaccine available for sale at the front office, but our staff is prohibited from administering this or any other vaccine, so it must be done by the owner before the dog enters the kennel area. Since Bordetella and other vaccines take time to become fully effective, Starmark Animal Behavior Center strongly recommends that all dogs are vaccinated by their veterinarian at least seven to fourteen days prior to boarding to best ensure their protection.

### **Clearing the Air**

For most dog owners, the health and well being of their pet is a top priority. Being cautious of the company and situations in which you place your dog can help him avoid undue illness. Remember, though easily spread between dogs, canine cough can also easily be prevented with your care and attentiveness.

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