

Kennel Cough (Infectious Tracheobronchitis)

What is kennel cough?

“Kennel cough” is an umbrella term for a number of highly contagious diseases that cause coughing in dogs. It is a somewhat misleading term, because a number of different bacteria and viruses can be responsible, and they can be caught in many different places.

What causes kennel cough?

Infection of the airways (trachea and bronchi) causes them to become inflamed and irritated, which triggers the coughing. Multiple different bacteria and viruses can cause tracheobronchitis, and often a dog will have more than one at the same time. The most common culprits are adenovirus-2, parainfluenza virus, and *Bordetella* bacteria.

Where can my dog catch kennel cough?

These viruses and bacteria are highly contagious. Risk of transmission is highest in areas where there are many dogs, such as kennels, doggy day-care, and training classes. But casual contact such as sniffing other dogs or surfaces, sharing water bowls, or playing, can all spread the disease.

What are the signs of kennel cough?

In most healthy dogs kennel cough is a mild illness, but it can be very loud and prolonged! Look out for:

- A loud, hacking, or “honking” cough
- Bringing up mucus, froth, or phlegm
- A cough that gets worse with excitement or exercise
- Mildly reduced energy levels and appetite
- Runny eyes or nose

Most cases resolve by themselves within 1-2 weeks, but the hacking cough can persist for 3 weeks.

When should I see a vet?

Just as with a human cough or cold, most cases of kennel cough can be managed at home (see below for ways to help your dog), but more severe cases should be seen by a vet. These include:

- Significant or complete loss of appetite
- Worsening lethargy
- Development of a soft or wet/productive cough
- Very young or elderly dogs, or those with weakened immune systems
- Difficulty breathing or laboured breathing
- Dogs that have underlying heart or lung problems
- A yellow or green nasal discharge

These are signs that your dog's immune system is struggling, or that a pneumonia has developed.

How is kennel cough treated?

At-Home Care

Most cases can be treated at home, as they will resolve on their own with time.

- Isolate your dog from others, and areas they walk – this disease is extremely contagious!
- Use a harness instead of a collar to reduce windpipe irritation
- Keep exercise light
- Use a humidifier, or place your dog in a steamy bathroom, to hydrate their irritated airways
- Some dogs may appreciate a spoonful of honey in warm water a few times per day

Veterinary Care

It is common for your vet to perform your appointment in the car park if it is suspected that your dog has kennel cough, to reduce the risk of it spreading into the hospital. Treatment may involve:

- *Home care*, which is as above
- *Anti-inflammatories* such as meloxicam (Loxicom/Metacam) can help calm the inflamed airways
- *Cough-suppressants* may be prescribed if the coughing is excessive, such as preventing sleep
- *Antibiotics* won't work against the viruses that cause kennel cough, but if a bacterial infection is suspected, or pneumonia has developed, antibiotics may be prescribed

Hospitalisation for kennel cough is rare, but may be offered if your dog is unwell with suspected pneumonia.

Is there a vaccine for kennel cough?

No vaccine can offer protection against all the viruses and bacteria that can cause kennel cough, however vaccines are available against the most common ones. Even still, these vaccines cannot offer 100% protection, but can reduce the severity and duration of illness.

- Your dog's core injectable vaccine (Nobivac DHP) includes adenovirus-2
- An additional intranasal vaccine (Nobivac KC) includes parainfluenza virus and *Bordetella*
- DHP is given every 3 years, and KC every year, to maintain immunity

The KC vaccine is a live vaccine, so can cause mild signs of kennel cough in the days after vaccination. The live *Bordetella* component can pose a risk to immunocompromised humans, so tell your vet if anyone in this category might come into contact with your dog shortly after their vaccination.

The DHP vaccine is included in Minster's Pet Health Plan, and the KC vaccine is discounted on the plan. Ask a member of our team or visit our website for more information:

<https://minstervets.co.uk/what-we-offer/pet-health-plan/>