

Kennel Cough (Infectious Tracheobronchitis)

Canine infectious tracheobronchitis, often referred to as “kennel cough,” causes inflammation of the windpipe and lower airways due to an infection with one or more infectious organisms. Both bacteria and viruses have been implicated in the canine infectious respiratory disease complex (CIRDC). Because it is so highly contagious, and because various treatments target different bacteria, testing for the specific bacteria and viruses involved in your pet’s case is advised.

Kennel cough most commonly causes a persistent, hacking cough with or without a terminal “retch” that produces foam/sputum. Dogs may have additional signs of an upper airway infection including nasal or ocular discharge (runny nose and eyes). Kennel cough is often mild and limited to upper airway signs and cough without lethargy, inappetence, or difficulty breathing.

Some cases can settle into lower airways, however, and cause bronchopneumonia. Bronchopneumonia will cause more severe signs, including lethargy, respiratory distress, decreased appetite, and difficulty oxygenating appropriately. Chest radiographs (x-rays) are recommended in any coughing patient to rule out more significant lower airway disease or pneumonia.

Pets with kennel cough may require antibiotic therapy. Cough suppressants and anti-inflammatory medications may be recommended, as well, but are used judiciously to avoid worsening an infection.

Kennel cough is highly contagious and can be associated with significant community outbreaks. If your pet is diagnosed with kennel cough, it is important to isolate him/her from other dogs for 2 weeks or until otherwise advised by your veterinarian.

If your dog frequents daycare or day-boarding, the dog park, or other facilities with other dogs, you should notify those facilities of your dog’s illness so that they can respond appropriately to mitigate an outbreak.