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INFECTIOUS TRACHEOBRONCHITIS (KENNEL COUGH)

What is it? Infectious tracheobronchitis is a contagious respiratory infection causing bronchitis in dogs. The common name of this condition is “Kennel Cough”. There are a variety of viruses, bacteria, and other microorganisms that can contribute to a Kennel Cough infection.

What animals are affected? The respiratory infection often is most severe in puppies between 6 weeks and 6 months old, although dogs of all ages can be affected. Symptoms are more common in dogs with other pre-existing respiratory problems.

What are the signs? Symptoms can range from mild to severe. Most dogs with mild symptoms exhibit a deep honking, hacking cough, but they feel fine otherwise. They may gag and cough up clear or frothy fluid after a coughing episode. Pet owners often think these patients have something stuck in their throats. Coughing fits may be worsened by excitement or exercise. Dogs with severe infections might also have a fever, nasal discharge, and eye discharge. They may refuse food and sometimes will cough so hard that they vomit. Lower respiratory infection (pneumonia) can develop in severe cases.

How is it diagnosed? Kennel Cough often is diagnosed based on clinical symptoms. Many dogs will cough when pressure is placed on the neck over the trachea. Pulling on a collar or placing pressure on their neck often will induce a cough. Chest radiographs (x-rays) can be used to determine if pneumonia is present. Bloodwork may reveal an elevated white blood cell count. In some cases, a tracheal wash can be performed under sedation to collect lung secretions for a culture to more accurately determine the cause of the infection.

How is it treated? Many cases will resolve without treatment, especially those caused by viruses. Cough suppressants may be helpful to relieve symptoms in uncomplicated cases. Antibiotic therapy is used for more severe disease or for dogs with pneumonia. Dogs with pneumonia may need to be hospitalized for IV fluid therapy, antibiotics, and oxygen. Limited activity is recommended for 1-3 weeks during recovery.

What after care is needed? Generally, no specific after-care is needed. Dogs with pneumonia may need follow-up chest radiographs.

What is the prognosis? Uncomplicated kennel cough resolves in 10-14 days. Severe cases with pneumonia may require 2-6 weeks for recovery.

Can it be prevented? A vaccine is available for *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, one of the main organisms that can cause Kennel Cough. Other causative agents of Kennel Cough are covered by the DHLPP, the basic dog combination vaccination. Since there are other infectious agents that can cause Kennel Cough, infection can still occur in vaccinated dogs. Kennel Cough is very contagious so dogs in crowded settings (dog parks, humane societies, and boarding facilities) may be at higher risk for contracting Kennel Cough.