

Ask A Vet: Prevent That Agonizing Doggie Cough

Sunday, May 8, 2016

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

We will be leaving on summer break soon with the family, but are boarding the dog at a kennel while we are gone. They require a kennel cough vaccine, which we've never given our dog before. What is kennel cough, and is the vaccine worthwhile?

Dear Pet-Owner,

That is a very good question, especially for this time of year as people are boarding their pets and spending more time outside at parks, on trails, etc. The true disease is called infectious tracheobronchitis; meaning inflammation of your trachea (windpipe) and bronchi (air tubes within your lungs). While it is commonly called kennel cough, infectious causes of this disease can be picked up wherever dogs are in close contact. Dog kennels are by far the most common source, but dog parks, doggie play dates, and even walking your dog in your neighborhood could be sources of infection. Any place where dogs can cough on each other has to be viewed as a potential source of infection.

There are many causes of kennel cough: 6 viruses and 5 bacterial species are the main pathogens. Vaccination is by far the best way of preventing any of these potential pathogens from causing disease. Most of the viral causes are included in the regular distemper-parvo combination vaccine provided by your veterinarian. Most of the bacterial species are not considered primary pathogens except for one. The primary bacterial species responsible for kennel cough is a bacterium called *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. Protection against this bacterium is the main purpose of the "kennel cough vaccine". The *Bordetella* vaccine comes in 3 forms: intranasal, intra-oral, and injectable. Discuss the advantages of each route with your veterinarian. Understanding that there are multiple causes of this disease complex is important, as your dog may develop a cough despite having had his/her vaccines.

Kennel cough (tracheobronchitis) usually presents as a persistent cough, normally described as a "goose-honk" cough, and elicited with slight pressure on the dog's neck. Some dogs can vomit after coughing, have decreased appetites, run a fever, have runny eyes, have trouble breathing, etc. Sometimes, the inflammation/infection of the trachea and bronchi can lead to pneumonia. These dogs are very sick, and frequently require a lot of therapy to help them recover. If detected early, the usual treatment for kennel cough is preventative antibiotics and cough suppressants. With appropriate therapy and rest, most dogs recover within 5-10 days.

Kennel cough is rarely a lethal disease, and something that we deal with on a daily or weekly basis. Many veterinarians have preferences for vaccination type and frequency. Additionally, most kennels or boarding facilities have requirements for vaccines for any pet boarding with them. For any questions, or further discussion of this disease process, consult your regular veterinarian.

-Dr. Jason Heitzman