

## Canine Cough

Now the accepted term for Kennel cough, is an infectious bronchitis characterized by a harsh, hacking cough that most people describe as "something stuck in my dog's throat." A dog with this cough generally feels active and maintains a normal appetite despite frequent fits of coughing. Dogs can make an assortment of respiratory sounds. Usually a cough is recognizable but it is important to be aware of another sound called a reverse sneeze.

The reverse sneeze is often mistaken for a cough, for a choking fit, for sneezing, for retching, or even for gasping for breath. In fact, the reverse sneeze represents a post-nasal drip or "tickle in the throat." It is considered normal, especially for small dogs or dogs and only requires attention if it is felt to be excessive. A dog's cough can be dry, or productive, meaning it is followed by a gag, swallowing motion, or production of foamy mucus (not to be confused with vomiting). A coughing dog that has a poor appetite, fever, and/or listlessness should be evaluated for pneumonia or heart disease.

The normal respiratory tract has substantial safeguards against invading infectious agents. The most important of these is called the mucociliary escalator. This safeguard consists of tiny hair-like structures called cilia that protrude from the cells lining the respiratory tract, and extend into a coat of mucus over them. The cilia beat in a coordinated fashion through the lower and more watery mucus layer called the sol. A thicker mucus layer called the gel floats on top of the sol. Debris, including infectious agents, get trapped in the sticky gel and the cilia move them upward towards the throat where the collection of debris and mucus may be coughed up and/or swallowed.

Without this protective mechanism, invading bacteria, especially *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, the chief agent of kennel cough, may simply march down the airways unimpeded. Irritants like smoke and viruses can stop the mucociliary escalator, produce a minor sore throat and cough, ultimately allowing a way in for the *Bordetella bronchiseptica* bacteria. In reality, most causes of coughing that begin acutely in a dog are due to infectious causes and usually represent some form of kennel cough.

Usually the history of exposure to a crowd of dogs within the proper time frame plus typical examination findings (a coughing dog that otherwise feels well) is adequate to make the diagnosis. Radiographs show bronchitis, although severe cases can progress to pneumonia. *Bordetella* infection can be picked up by rabbits, guinea pigs, pigs, cats (if they are very young and housed in groups), and other dogs.

*Bordetella* is generally not considered contagious to humans although it is closely related to *Bordetella pertussis*, the agent of whooping cough. Immune-suppressed humans potentially could be infected. Among dogs kennel cough is fairly contagious depending on stress level, vaccination status, and exposure to minor viruses. Dogs shed *Bordetella* organisms for up to 3 months after infection.



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*against Bordetella. This vaccination may not completely  
severity and duration of the illness. Note that all vaccines  
for canine cough have to be given yearly.*

Kind Regards,  
Scott and Chris