

FACT SHEET

WHAT IS "KENNEL COUGH?"

"Kennel cough" is the common name for a highly contagious upper respiratory disease of dogs. It is caused by canine parainfluenza virus, a bacteria called *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, or a combination of these two (and possibly other viruses and bacteria). Veterinarians may refer to kennel cough as infectious tracheobronchitis (ITB), canine upper respiratory infection (CURI), or canine contagious respiratory disease (CCRD). Kennel cough is commonly seen in dogs who are exposed to many other dogs in places such as animal shelters or boarding kennels. Kennel cough is "species specific," meaning it infects only dogs and puppies, not cats or humans.

HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?

Kennel cough is transferred between dogs by fluid discharged from the mouth or nose of an infected dog, similar to the transfer of the common cold between humans. Dogs can shed the virus through the air by sneezing, coughing, or breathing; or by direct physical contact with cages, toys, food bowls, even the hands and clothes of people handling them. Some dogs may be "silent carriers," carrying and spreading the virus without showing symptoms of the disease themselves.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

The most common symptom of kennel cough is a dry cough (sometimes described as "honking") and in some cases gagging after the cough. The cough is often brought on by excitement, exercise, or pressure on the dog's trachea, such as that produced by a leash. Some dogs will only exhibit a runny nose. Affected dogs are usually otherwise alert and active, with a healthy appetite and no fever. In some cases, kennel cough may progress to pneumonia. In these cases, dogs will cough up mucus, have nasal discharge, have difficulty breathing, run a fever, lose their appetite, and become depressed.

WHICH DOGS GET IT?

Any dog who is stressed by overcrowding, poor nutrition, cold or heat, age, fear, or infection with another disease is susceptible to kennel cough. Dogs who are especially at risk for infection include unvaccinated dogs, puppies (because they have immature immune systems), and dogs whose immune systems are compromised by another disease, such as heartworm disease, cancer, malnutrition, or parasites. Well-vaccinated dogs who have healthy immune systems may still be susceptible to the disease, but symptoms are very mild and short-term, usually limited to 5 to 10 days of coughing with no fever or loss of appetite.

HOW IS KENNEL COUGH TREATED?

Kennel cough is a "self-limiting" disease, meaning that in most dogs it will go away in 5 to 10 days without treatment. Because most shelter dogs and puppies are under stress, antibiotics are often prescribed by the attending veterinarian to prevent or treat secondary bacterial infections that may accompany the infection. Occasionally a veterinarian will prescribe a cough suppressant to make the dog feel better and to decrease the throat irritation caused by coughing. In rare cases, kennel cough may progress to pneumonia, requiring more intense medical therapy and possibly hospitalization.

HOW IS KENNEL COUGH PREVENTED?

Kennel cough cannot be totally prevented in the shelter environment; many dogs will enter the shelter already infected, and the stress of being sheltered will lead to full-blown disease and spread of the infection to other dogs and puppies. The shelter's goal should be to limit the disease as much as possible, and to strengthen the health of all sheltered dogs so that infections are mild and short-lived. Sanitation programs, health evaluation, isolation of sick and injured dogs, and preventive health care (vaccinations and deworming) all play a part in the control of kennel cough. Many types and brand names of vaccines are available to counter kennel cough. The vaccination protocol used should be determined by a veterinarian who is familiar with the special health needs of sheltered dogs and puppies and who is familiar with your shelter's environment and its inhabitants.