

Kennel Cough Complex

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There is both a viral (parainfluenza) and a bacterial component to the kennel cough complex. The most common components are para-influenza virus, adenovirus CAV-2 (rarely CAV-1) and Bordatella bronchiseptica (a mycoplasma), which is a commonly seen contaminant in kennel cough. As the bacteria involved can vary, the vaccines are given against the most commonly involved bacteria (usually bordatella bronchiseptica) and parainfluenza virus so they will cover many but not all strains floating around in the dog population.

Symptoms - Kennel cough is generally seen as an upper respiratory tract infection characterised by a hoarse cough, particularly noticeable after exercise of any kind. As the mucous membranes are irritated there is a heavy mucous production particularly in the first few days. Some dogs may gag early in the course of the infection, and bring up small amounts of frothy sputum.

Many owners are convinced their dog has "something stuck in its throat" in the early stages, but as most dogs are still eating quite well, this is obviously not the case. Affected dogs can look and act quite normal until they get up and move around and immediately start coughing.

Kennel cough in itself does not cause much physical depression: the dog is rarely, if ever, off its food for more than 24-48 hours.

Incubation is 7-10 days and it is extremely contagious. The disease can spread very rapidly within a kennel, particularly in the younger individuals. The course of the infection takes about 7-10 days. The coughing, on the other hand, can last for any time up to three weeks (average 10 days).

Management – Once kennel cough gets into a kennel, there can be a roll-on effect and it may take 3-6 weeks for the infection to completely clear the kennel.

Treatment is aimed at minimising coughing. In addition to anything prescribed by your veterinarian, reduced exercise will help to reduce coughing and decrease further irritation in the upper trachea. Rest, antibiotics and a cough suppressant or low dose of buffered aspirin are often all that is needed. A mucolytic agent (Bisolven*) may also be helpful. The less the dog runs around, the less the larynx is irritated, the faster the recovery. Racing dogs need at least three weeks complete rest before racing again.

Kennel Cough vaccines Para-influenza appears to be the most contagious component of Kennel Cough and it is well worthwhile giving the vaccine to racing dogs, dogs that are about to be kennelled and possibly show dogs that are being shown heavily (ie. that have a high degree of exposure).

Again, as with most viruses, you need two doses of the vaccine to obtain a good cover, preferably 3-4 weeks apart.

As the infection comes about from a combination of viruses and bacteria, the strains involved vary, as can the relative effectiveness of the vaccine. Ideally, top up Kennel Cough vaccine shortly before placing your dog in a kennel situation (ideally within 10-14 days prior to going to the kennels).

****As a general rule of thumb with vaccines:***

- **Viral vaccines** will usually produce a good and long lasting immunity following the initial vaccine and follow up booster (particularly the 12-15 month vaccine). Rabies, while not present in Australia is required to be re-vaccinated every 3 years.
- **Bacterial vaccines** generally will not develop the high lasting titres of viral vaccines. These therefore are shorter acting vaccines on the whole and generally are given only in the face of an outbreak of the disease or planning to kennel your dog in a commercial establishment.