

Kennel Cough/Bordetella

Anyone whose dog goes to a boarding kennel, grooming salon, or day care has heard of *kennel cough* – usually because the kennel, salon, or day care will require their dog to be vaccinated against this disease. But what is kennel cough, exactly?

If you answered *bordetella*, you're close. You've also been paying attention. Bordetella is the actual name of the “kennel cough vaccine”, the weird one that your veterinarian squirts into your pup's nose. But bordetella – *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, to give the bug its full name – isn't the only player in kennel cough. Kennel cough can be caused by a variety of different viruses and bacteria. What all these bugs have in common is that they colonize a dog's upper airways, causing inflammation of the trachea (the “windpipe”) and bronchi. This brings on the classic symptom: that deep, dry, hacking cough that comes on in spasms and sometimes ends with a gagging retch.

Is it serious? Usually not, dogs with kennel cough rarely run fevers or lose their appetites, and most respond readily to antibiotics. (The veterinarian may also prescribe a cough medication, so the dog gets some relief and everyone can get some sleep). The biggest worry – for the owners of the boarding kennel, grooming salon, and day care facility – is how to keep the disease from spreading. Kennel cough spreads through the air, and is so contagious that one coughing dog can infect an entire kennel in a short period of time. This is why the vaccine is required in most dog businesses. If a dog is exposed, the incubation period (the time from exposure until the start of symptoms) ranges from 3 to 10 days.

Well, you say, this is all very interesting. But my dog is vaccinated. So, no worries, right? Again – close. But....

Dogs at risk for contracting kennel cough – those that are “out and about” – are routinely vaccinated against 2 of the most common culprits: *Bordetella bronchiseptica* and *parainfluenza virus*. However, there are different strains of these bugs, and the vaccines don't protect against all strains. (Similar to the “flu shot” that we get in the winter). And other bugs, besides bordetella and parainfluenza, can cause kennel cough. So yes, a vaccinated dog can still become infected. But this is *unusual*. Just be aware that, even though your dog is vaccinated, being around other dogs – whether at a dog park, a boarding kennel, or day care – carries some inherent risk of infection. Minimize that risk by keeping your dog current on his or her vaccines, according to your veterinarian's recommendations. And know the classic symptom: that dry, hacking cough. If you hear it, call your veterinarian immediately. (Lots of diseases can cause a cough, and some of them are very serious; your veterinarian can determine if your dog has kennel cough, or if something else is going on).

And finally: don't worry. Let your dog go play!

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Frequently asked question???

Can my dog contract kennel cough just by walking past another dog?

Yeah, a susceptible dog can get kennel cough by passing an infected dog when on a walk. Doesn't mean he'd always get it, but it would be a risk. The transmission is airborne, so they don't have to sniff nose-to-nose. That's how one dog can infect an entire kennel, even if he has no direct contact with the other dogs. (Which is why this virus is such a PAIN...)