

Protecting dogs against outbreaks of respiratory disease

June 2 2023



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Dog owners are likely familiar with the respiratory disease commonly known as kennel cough; while most cases have been historically mild, a more severe form of the infection is on the rise.

Because kennel cough is an infectious respiratory disease complex that easily spreads among [dogs](#), Dr. Kathleen Aicher, an assistant professor at the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, said it's important to know the signs and symptoms of the disease as well as what to do if you suspect your dog has been exposed.

"There are a variety of agents that can cause kennel cough, whether bacterial or viral," Aicher said. "But, sometimes, kennel cough cases can be worsened by other contagious respiratory infections that dogs can get that they are not protected against, or they can become more severely affected, leading to severe kennel cough cases."

Mild vs. severe cases

Traditionally, dogs with a mild case of kennel cough can recover quickly after being prescribed cough suppressants or supportive care that focuses on relieving symptoms, which can include fever, coughing, nasal snuffling or discharge, discharge from the eyes, and sneezing.

On the other hand, dogs who contract severe cases of respiratory disease may require extensive treatment, as these cases can impact dogs' long-term health. Aicher pointed out that in recent years, veterinarians have observed outbreaks in regions of the country in which younger dogs have been more severely affected.

These dogs have required more diagnostics and [supportive care](#) than has historically been the case for "garden variety" kennel cough. Some dogs have developed long-lasting symptoms, which can affect their health for the remainder of their lives.

"Dogs who have a more severe form become affected very quickly and may require hospitalization and oxygen, which are things that dogs with kennel cough don't usually need," Aicher said.

"Some may have lasting disease or damage in their lungs that persists, leading to the need for longer-term [medical therapy](#) or, in rare cases, surgery to remove a diseased portion of the lungs. So it's important that if owners suspect their dog might have kennel cough that they consult with their veterinarian, regardless of the severity of their symptoms, so that they can know what action to take."

Prevention

To best protect against contagious respiratory disease, Aicher said owners should ensure that their dogs are vaccinated against bacteria and viruses that can cause kennel cough, such as the bacteria *Bordetella* and canine influenza.

"In addition to vaccinating dogs, owners should make sure to bring dogs to places that only accept healthy, vaccinated dogs, and if they know their dog is sick or if their dog is exhibiting symptoms of respiratory illness, owners should not bring them around other dogs," Aicher said. "This will prevent dogs from unknowingly spreading the illness to other dogs, in case they are contagious."

When to go to the vet

If your dog has been around other dogs, such as at a boarding facility or doggy daycare, owners should take heed of any initial symptoms of respiratory diseases your dog may exhibit following their exposure to other dogs.

"If dogs develop a cough, have trouble breathing, or feel poorly after being around other dogs, then their owners should have them seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible or visit an emergency clinic if their veterinarian is not available," Aicher said.

Before arriving at the clinic or hospital, Aicher strongly recommends that owners inform the veterinary team who will be providing their dog's care that the incoming patient has been around other dogs, since [kennel cough](#) is contagious.

"The veterinary team may choose to wear [personal protective equipment](#) (PPE) or bring your dog through a different entrance into the hospital to prevent the disease from spreading easily. They may take additional precautions that would be different if it was for another cause of respiratory symptoms, like [heart disease](#) or asthma," Aicher said.

While contagious respiratory diseases can have devastating effects, Aicher reiterates to owners that their dogs are very likely to recover fully, especially with the guidance of their veterinarian.

"The majority of dogs recover from this disease without any sort of problems, and they go back to living healthy normal lives," Aicher said. "For those who are more severely affected, talking to a veterinarian sooner and getting their dog checked out are ways that can help with a faster recovery."

Respiratory diseases can be troubling for [dog owners](#) and their furry friends alike. By prioritizing your dog's respiratory health and remaining vigilant when your dog begins feeling unwell, owners can relax knowing that their pet is protected while also protecting other dogs.

Provided by Texas A&M University

Citation: Protecting dogs against outbreaks of respiratory disease (2023, June 2) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-06-dogs-outbreaks-respiratory-disease.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.