

KENNEL COUGH & CANINE INFLUENZA

It is very important to understand that “kennel cough” is NOT an informal name for canine influenza. Kennel cough is a common name for the condition caused by infection with a bacteria called *Bordetella bronchiseptica* (there can be other bacteria there, too, but *Bordetella* is most common). Kennel cough (the disease and the nickname) has been around for many years, and the vaccine—now an intranasal vaccine—is very effective in preventing it when it is administered prior to exposure to an ill dog. Kennel cough got its common name because it most frequently affects dogs that are boarded or kept in kennels where many dogs can come in contact with each other. It’s very probable that the term ‘kennel cough’ existed before people even knew what caused it—unfortunately, the nickname is pretty well entrenched in dog-owning society. In our materials, the AVMA refers to kennel cough only as the common name for *Bordetella* infection, because the majority of people know it as kennel cough. In addition, many veterinarians use the proper name, but then have to say ‘kennel cough’ because the owner doesn’t understand the proper name of *Bordetella* infection.

Canine influenza, often confused with kennel cough in the early stages of disease, is caused by the canine influenza virus. Like *Bordetella*, it can spread rapidly through contact with infected dogs. However, it can be more difficult to treat, and there is no vaccine for it yet. It is more fatal than kennel cough, although the majority of dogs will recover with treatment. The AVMA never refers to canine influenza as kennel cough, but we mention in our materials that the two are easily confused when the dog first becomes sick, because the symptoms you’ll see with them are essentially the same. Often, the diagnosis of canine influenza is made because the dog doesn’t recover as quickly as it would if it had *Bordetella* infection.

As both kennel cough and canine influenza are spread by contact with infected dogs, there is a risk of infection any time a large number of dogs come together. This is true for many diseases. Puppies and older dogs are often at higher risk of infection when exposed to an ill dog. Your group is taking the appropriate steps to prevent further problems by vaccinating your dogs for *Bordetella*. Other measures you may wish to consider include the following:

1. Owners of animals with any signs of illness (vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, nasal discharge, etc.) should not bring their dogs to a group meeting, because their dog may have an illness that can be passed to other dogs. This isn’t a guarantee, though; some infected animals may not seem sick yet, but are still able to pass on an infection. If the dog is obviously ill (even slightly), it should be kept away from other dogs.
2. Owners of puppies that haven’t finished their full set of vaccinations (and therefore aren’t fully protected against the diseases) should be aware that their puppies are at high risk of illness if they expose them to other dogs with unknown or questionable vaccine histories and health status.

The AVMA has a wide range of animal health brochures that may interest you, and they can be read or downloaded from our Web site at no charge. If you go to our home page (www.avma.org), go to the far right column (public resources) and click on the “animal health brochures” link—it will show you the brochures we have. If you click the link on an individual brochure, you’ll get more information about it and you’ll see the options to view it or download it. Please continue to consult with your veterinarian about any issues with your dogs. By keeping your dogs healthy, you get to keep them around longer. Good luck!

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