

It's Not Just "Kennel Cough"

We are all familiar with the symptoms of a canine upper respiratory infection: the hollow, barking cough; the runny, wet nose; and the listless expression that comes with exhausting fever. These are the symptoms of the common shelter ailment, infectious tracheobronchitis, better known as the generic "Kennel Cough" and often easily treated with a combination of rest and antibiotics.

But these are also the symptoms of other, more serious diseases.

Take Canine Distemper for example. Despite extensive vaccination throughout affected regions in the United States, Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) remains a persistent and virulent disease among dogs in our organizations and the wider community. It spreads through aerosol droplets (tiny particles of moisture from coughing or sneezing) and contact with infected bodily fluids including nasal and ocular secretions, feces, and urine. It can even spread through food and water contaminated with these fluids. Puppies, with their developing immune systems, are most susceptible to this virus which can take up to 22 days post-exposure for symptoms to appear.

The symptoms of an upper respiratory infection can also be caused by canine influenza. According to the Center for Disease Control, in September of 2005, canine influenza was identified by experts as "*a newly emerging pathogen in the dog population*" in the United States. The mortality rate of dogs infected with this disease is fortunately small, however nearly all dogs are susceptible and the disease can manifest itself in infected dogs with either asymptomatic infections (no symptoms) or severe expressions characterized by the onset of pneumonia. Although this is a relatively new cause of disease among dogs, approximately 80 percent will have at least a mild form of the "dog flu" in their lifetimes and like CDV and infectious tracheobronchitis, canine influenza spreads through aerosolized respiratory secretions from infected dogs and contact with contaminated people and objects.

There is therefore a significant risk in the misdiagnosis, or the all too common grouping of these diseases under the generic term "Kennel Cough". The potential misdiagnosis of these ailments for the more easily treated "Kennel Cough" risks conditioning animal welfare practitioners to becoming less vigilant in recognizing and treating these other more dangerous diseases.

During my tenure at the Humane Society of Boulder Valley and following an outbreak of CDV, we were fortunate enough to enlist the aid of Dr. Sandra Newbury, National Shelter Medicine Extension Veterinarian for the Koret Shelter Medicine Program at the University of California. Among Dr. Newbury's recommendations was to rename our "Kennel Cough" ward the "Upper Respiratory" ward. This simple change alone can help ensure each new case is treated as seriously as though it were CDV, canine influenza, or some other deadly disease, helping in turn to ensure the correct treatment is offered before the disease progresses.

Even with these best efforts though, controlling and preventing the spread of these diseases is a one of the biggest challenges facing animal welfare organizations, especially considering their introduction into shelters is largely beyond control; an asymptomatic stray dog can pass the initial medical exam only to infect other animals in your care, or prospective adopters may not recognize the symptoms of a sick pet at home and unknowingly bring disease into your organization.

Other ways Dr. Newbury suggests to help prevent outbreaks of respiratory illness include:

- **Practice Post-Treatment Testing:** At the first signs of respiratory illness, most groups start basic Kennel Cough treatment. If the dog does not respond to treatment within seven to ten days, test for other possible infections.
- **Clean Well, Clean Last:** Enforce strict cleaning and husbandry practices in quarantine areas; staff and volunteers should clean these spaces last and wear protective equipment to avoid cross-contamination.

- **Educate:** Make sure your staff and volunteers know the risks of spreading disease through their own dogs, especially if they bring them to work and/or have under-vaccinated dogs at home. Screen new pet adopters before allowing them to interact with your animals.
- **Cohort Transfers:** Inbound transfers should be grouped together on entry and stay together until medical exams and spay/neuter is complete.

Furthermore, as a member of the PetPoint network, your adoption program is supported by the ShelterCare Gift of Insurance which covers common illnesses and accidents for shelter pets. Last year, new pet adopters submitted over \$1.2-million in ShelterCare Gift claims for upper respiratory infections including infectious tracheobronchitis, CDV, and canine influenza. Encouraging your new pet adopters to opt for this coverage and following the simple guidelines above can both reduce the return of unhealthy dogs to your shelter and help ensure a decrease in the spread of these diseases.

Bringing a new pet home is an exciting and often overwhelming experience for your adopters, who can have difficulty digesting new information at the time of adoption. Help ensure your new pet adopters confirm their coverage with these three, easy steps:

1. Your adopters will receive a ShelterCare Gift confirmation email within 1 hour of adoption. Make sure they know the email is coming and to check their “spam” folders just in case.
2. Is your shelter reaching out post-adoption? Incorporate the ShelterCare Gift into your follow-up communications with an easy automation tool such as “Survey Gizmo” to remind your adopters to accept the Gift.
3. Most new pet adopters won’t read their Adoption Package onsite. Discuss the benefits of the ShelterCare program and encourage them to read the supporting documents when they get home.

Did you know?

As a PetPoint organization, your staff and volunteers are eligible for 10% off their ShelterCare pet insurance. Having this coverage can help ensure pets receive the right medical attention when they need it.

Ask us how ShelterCare can help protect your shelter’s pets.

Sincerely,

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