

# *Mountain View Animal Hospital*

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## **Kennel Cough (Bordetella)**

### **WHAT IS KENNEL COUGH?**

Kennel cough is a bronchitis characterized by a harsh, hacking cough which most people describe as sounding like “something stuck in my dog’s throat”. It is analogous to a chest cold for humans and is only a serious condition in special circumstances. It is caused by a complex of infectious agents, including bacteria and viruses, but the most important cause is a bacteria called *Bordetella bronchiseptica*.

The normal respiratory tract has substantial safeguards against invading infectious agents. The most important of these is probably the “mucociliary escalator”. This consists of tiny hair like structures called cilia which line the respiratory tract and a coat of mucus over them. The cilia beat in an organized fashion and debris, including microorganisms, get trapped in the sticky mucus. The cilia slowly move the debris upwards towards the throat where it may be coughed up and/or swallowed. Without this mechanism, bacteria and viruses can simply march down the airways unimpeded. *Bordetella bronchiseptica* binds to these cilia and renders them unable to move, thereby allowing for easier infection.

In general, it resolves on its own within several weeks. Be aware, however, that it usually gets worse before it gets better and that it can take up to 4 weeks to completely improve. Classically, dogs get infected when they are kept in a crowded situation with poor air circulation but lots of warm air (i.e. a boarding kennel, animal hospital, obedience class, local park or grooming parlor). Kennel cough is extremely contagious among dogs and infection spreads rapidly among dogs housed together. We currently recommend keeping your dog up to date on *Bordetella* vaccination, as you never know when they will be in contact with infected dogs.

### **TREATMENT**

Although most cases go away on their own, we generally prescribe antibiotics for your dog in order to prevent secondary infections that may lead to pneumonia or a more serious infection. Depending on the severity of the coughing, we may also prescribe a cough suppressant to provide comfort during recovery.

### **HOME CARE**

Simply continue to give the prescribed medications as directed and observe your dog for improvement. Again, expect that your dog’s coughing may become somewhat worse before it gets better. Oftentimes, these infections are caught early and the worst is yet to come! If you have not already vaccinated your dog for *Bordetella*, consider doing so from now on. Although no vaccine is perfect and breaks do occur, the severity of future infections can be significantly reduced with regular vaccination.