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Refuse this vaccine it doesn't work.

Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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Kennel cough, or bordetella, is a common and highly contagious upper respiratory condition in dogs.

Most cases of kennel cough are acquired in facilities like animal shelters and boarding kennels where lots of dogs are housed in close quarters. The universal symptom of a bordetella infection is a dry hacking cough. It's best to let mild cases of kennel cough in otherwise healthy dogs run their course with the aid of natural, nontoxic remedies.

It's also best to avoid bordetella vaccines; instead, focus on supporting your dog's immune system.

Kennel cough, also called infectious tracheobronchitis, is a very common upper respiratory infection in dogs.

If your canine family member seems to be coughing a lot or making choking sounds, the dog may have kennel cough, especially if the dog has recently spent time at a dog shelter, boarding facility or some other setting where the dog was exposed to a lot of other dogs.

Kennel cough is a form of bronchitis and is similar to a chest cold in humans.

It has a number of different causes, the most common of which is the *Bordetella bronchiseptica* bacteria.

Many people think bordetella bacteria alone causes kennel cough, but that's technically inaccurate.

In fact, dogs who acquire bordetella bacteria usually also have a virus, such as adenovirus, [distemper](#), and herpes or parainfluenza that makes them more vulnerable to infection.

How dogs get kennel cough.

Kennel cough is very contagious, and dogs can remain infectious for six to 14 weeks after symptoms resolve.

Dog-to-dog exposure occurs when an infected dog coughs or sneezes and a healthy dog inhales the aerosolized respiratory secretions.

The canine respiratory tract is coated in a protective lining of mucus.

If this lining is compromised, an infection can take hold from the inhaled particles.

The result is inflammation of the larynx and trachea.

It's the inflammation that causes the coughing.

If the healthy dog's respiratory tract is compromised by stressors such as travel, being housed in a crowded environment, cold temperatures, environmental pollutants or infectious viruses, then *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, which is the chief infectious bacterial agent in kennel cough, can enter the respiratory tract.

Bordetella bacteria are usually accompanied by at least one other infectious agent, typically a virus.

Kennel cough is actually multiple infections occurring at the same time and not just a single infection.

This is one of the reasons the [Bordetella vaccine is often not effective](#).

Most cases of kennel cough occur in dogs with suppressed immune systems who spend time in crowded quarters with inadequate ventilation and lots of warm air.

Examples are boarding facilities, grooming shops and animal shelters.

Symptoms of Kennel cough.

The universal symptom of a bordetella infection is a persistent, hard, honking [cough](#).

A sudden dry hacking cough, sneezing, snorting, retching, gagging or vomiting in response to very light pressure to the trachea, or a spasmodic cough when a dog is excited or exercising, are common symptoms of kennel cough.

If your healthy dog suddenly develops spasmodic coughing, you should suspect kennel cough.

Your dog may also cough up foamy white phlegm or have nasal or eye secretions.

Occasionally, there will be other signs of illness such as a runny nose, sneezing, depression or a mild fever.

Symptoms of infection usually appear two to 14 days after exposure in mild cases of kennel cough.

Symptoms usually last between 10 and 20 days and can recur during periods of stress. In mild cases, dogs usually continue to eat and remain alert.

When the condition is more serious, there can be lethargy, loss of appetite and in a worst-case scenario, the infection can progress to life-threatening [pneumonia](#).

Severe cases of kennel cough primarily occur in immunocompromised dogs or in very young puppies.

It's rare to lose a dog with a competent immune system to kennel cough.

Diagnosis and treatment.

Diagnosis of kennel cough includes taking a history of the symptoms the dog is experiencing, as well as any history of time spent at a boarding kennel, [puppy mill](#), shelter or other facility where lots of dogs are housed.

Bacterial cultures, viral isolations and bloodwork may be performed to identify the specific pathogens causing the infection.

Sometimes x-rays are taken to check for pneumonia or [bronchitis](#).

Most cases of kennel cough resolve on their own without medical intervention, so I don't automatically recommend that you have to zip off to the veterinarian, especially for [unnecessary antibiotics](#), because antibiotics don't address the viral component of this infection.

I always prefer to let the dog's body heal itself naturally.

During the acute phase of the illness, I strongly recommend using a harness to prevent your dog's collar from aggravating the situation, especially if she tends to pull against her leash on walks.

You can also try humidifying the air to help reduce or alleviate coughing spells.

I like to add a few drops of pure lavender oil to the water to help soothe the throat.

Complete recovery from kennel cough can take up to three weeks in healthy dogs, and twice as long in older patients or those with underlying immunosuppressive conditions.

Puppies can also take a bit longer to recover because their immune systems are not yet fully developed.

Since a serious episode of kennel cough can result in pneumonia, if your dog doesn't start to improve on her own within about a week, the coughing becomes progressively worse, she develops a fever or stops eating, it's very important to make an appointment with your veterinarian.

I also recommend seeing your vet if you have a puppy with symptoms that go beyond the typical symptoms of kennel cough, such as a change in breathing patterns, difficulty breathing, loss of appetite or a markedly diminished energy level.

Natural remedies for kennel cough.

There are several wonderful natural remedies I've used for years to speed dogs' recovery from kennel cough and reduce the severity of symptoms:

Esberitox is a fast-acting echinacea that can be very effective in reducing the virulence of bordetella infections.

Local honey.

Raw garlic and olive leaf are natural antibacterial and antiviral agents. Slippery elm can help soothe sore, irritated throats, as well as Throat Coat tea.

Vitamin C is an antiviral and vitamin E provides immune system support.

Essential oils can be used to help a dog with kennel cough breathe easier.

Oils of eucalyptus, lavender and tea tree have antibacterial and antiviral properties.

Homeopathic nosodes stimulate the immune system to react against specific diseases, but since they require a prescription, you'll need to

work with an integrative veterinarian.

Bordetella Vaccine.

Many veterinarians recommend bordetella vaccines, either by injection or by intranasal delivery.

However, I am one of the veterinarians who does not.

Many boarding kennels, doggy daycare facilities, groomers and other similar businesses require that dogs be vaccinated for kennel cough. The reason behind this requirement is to remove liability from those businesses.

Veterinary immunology authority *Dr. Ronald Schultz* has stated that bordetella is an "un-vaccinatable" disease.

The vaccines are generally ineffective and will not prevent your dog from getting kennel cough.

The infection is caused by a wide variety of bacterial and viral agents, and no single vaccine can provide protection from them all, nor will the vaccine treat an active infection.

In addition, whatever protection the vaccine might offer wears off very quickly, usually in less than a year, which means your dog will need to be revaccinated every six months if you patronize businesses that demand the vaccine.

On the rare occasion I must provide a bordetella vaccine for a dog who will be traveling or boarded, I always use the nose drop variety, as it's much less toxic.

It doesn't contain the strong adjuvants the injectable version has, and it carries few if any side effects.

And remember, your dog can still acquire kennel cough infection even if the dog's been vaccinated.