

# *Info shared by Pitbull SA.*

*Manjaro APBT kennel.*

*South Africa.*

*My Website [www.pitbullsa.co.za](http://www.pitbullsa.co.za)*

*My E mail "[manjaro@pitbullsa.co.za](mailto:manjaro@pitbullsa.co.za)"*

*My Facebook "Gawie Manjaro"*

*My Facebook page "Manjaro Kennel"*

*My mobile +27827838280.*

*Zello.com "VoIP" – ask for info.*

## *Why is my dog or cat coughing?*

*Ron Hines DVM PhD*

**Conditions that commonly cause dogs to cough;**

[Kennel Cough](#)

[Collapsing Trachea](#)

[Heartworm Disease](#)

[Heart Failure](#)

**Much less frequently:**

[Heartworms](#)

[Lungworms](#)

[Intestinal ParasitesBordatella](#)

Pets cough for so many reasons.

Some of them are very minor and some of them are not. It can be because your pet drank its water a bit too fast - or it could be the first sign of serious problems of the heart or lungs. Here are some of the common causes - but some pets cough for less common reasons that are not mentioned in this article.

### **How does a veterinarian decide?**

When I question owners about their dog's cough I begin the interview with the same set of questions every time.

We call this the History:

**Is it a small breed less than 5 kg or is it larger?**

**How long has it been coughing?**

**How old is your dog?**

**Is the cough harsh and dry or is it moist and productive?**

**Does your dog cough most when it is up and active or when it is lying down?**

**Is your pet listless or more depressed than usual?**

**Is it having [trouble breathing](#) or breathing rapidly?**

**Does the problem occur this season every year?**

**Does your dog sneeze too and have a runny nose?**

**Has the dog been boarded or groomed recently?**

**Has your dog gained or lost weight?**

**Are there any other changes you have noticed in your dog?**

These questions give me a basis to begin my examination.

I usually begin my exam by looking at the dog as it walks around the exam room.

### **Then I look in the dog's mouth.**

I check to see if its gums are pale or bluish or if blood vesicles in the gums stand out (injected gums).

Injected gums can be associated with heart disease.

**Enlarged tonsils often cause a cough.**

I check the dog's tonsils.

**I also check that the dog has nothing lodged in its throat.**

I look for inflamed eyes and a crusty nose, which often accompany kennel cough and I massage the dog's trachea (wind pipe) to see if that causes coughing.

I check the dog's neck to see if it has an abnormal pulse is present in the jugular vein and I feel the dog's abdomen to detect fluids or an enlarged liver or spleen.

Then I use a stethoscope to listen to the heart and lungs.

Lung sounds that are dry and harsh often accompany upper respiratory tract infections.

Moist congested lung sounds can indicate pneumonia or lung congestion due to heart disease. Both these conditions cause coughing.

I check to see if any of the dog's superficial lymph nodes are enlarged and I take the pet's temperature.

The following are many of the common causes of cough.

The list is not complete - but it covers most of the cases that I have seen.

**Breed characteristic:**

Dogs with flat faces that snore, often have elongated soft pallets in the rear of their mouths.

This can cause coughing.

Pekingese, Pugs, Bulldogs, Lhasa Apsos, Shih-Tzu fall into this category.

When serious flare-ups occur in these dogs, I put these dogs on a short course of corticosteroid and antibiotic treatment.

Occasionally the problem is so severe that the dog does not get enough air.

When this is the case, I can surgically remove a portion of the soft palate.

This is very exacting surgery and must be performed cautiously.

If too much tissue is removed or scarring occurs, the coughing will become worse and the dog will breathe food and water into its lungs.

### **Tonsillitis:**

Tonsil infections is passed from pet to dog through close contact, coughing, sneezing and through contaminated food, water bowls and other objects.

It is most common in toy breeds of dogs and puppies.

With certain infections such as kennel cough, the tonsils enlarge, partially obstructing the dog's throat.

Usually both tonsils are affected.

When enlarged tonsils become inflamed and ulcerated the dog will spend hours trying to cough them up.

This is a retching, violent cough that usually ends in a gag, producing foam.

These dogs will sometimes paw at their mouths.

I treat many of these animals with a two-week course of antibiotics.

My favorite antibiotic for this problem is trimethoprim/sulfa.

If the tonsillitis returns frequently, I remove the tonsils.

Many toy breeds have large tonsils, but removing them rarely prevents coughing.

In these breeds, it is usually a narrow trachea that is the root of the problem.

### **Tooth and mouth infections:**

Dogs in general are very subject to gum disease, loose infected teeth and mouth inflammation.

This is partly due to their genetics but also due to feeding them soft table foods.

These oral infections sometimes inflame the rear of the throat causing coughing.

Often the problem is magnified by a flabby, narrow trachea or windpipe as well as tonsillitis due to the mouth infection.

This is quite serious because the infection often migrates to the valves of the heart (mitral valve) damaging the heart as well.

These dogs need to have all diseased teeth removed.

This is not major surgery in these dogs because the teeth are already loose and no longer used in eating.

I place these dogs on two or three weeks of antibiotics and try to get the owners to feed them balanced dog foods.

Changing these dog's eating habits is not easy.

### **Kennel cough.**

Kennel cough of dogs, also called infectious tracheobronchitis and CIRDC, is a group of diseases caused by the bacteria, Bordetella bronchiseptica as well as many respiratory tract virus.

The signs of bordetella, parainfluenza virus and Canine Adeno-2 virus and respiratory coronavirus are identical and often the two or three organisms work in tandem along with mycoplasma to cause the cough.

To get this problem, your dog must have had contact with a sick or recovering dog.

Soft dry coughs and sneezing are the two most common signs.

They begin 2-7 days after the dog was exposed.

Some dogs with this problem only cough when they are excited.

Kennel cough is highly contagious and passes directly from dog to dog at kennels, grooming parlours, dog stores, doggy parks and humane societies.

Dogs with this disease rarely feel ill although they may vomit food and foam due to enlarged tonsils and tracheal irritation. In healthy dogs, the cough lasts seven days to three weeks.

But it can persist much longer in flat-faced breeds or dogs with narrow tracheas (windpipes).

I have never seen a case of kennel cough that endangered a dog's life.

But if a dog is seriously ill in other ways, kennel cough can push it over the edge.

It is not clear that antibiotics will make your dog get well any faster.

But I place many dogs on antibiotics for a week or two - chiefly because owners are so annoyed by the dog's discomfort and constant racket.

If the cough is not too severe I dispense a guaifenesin-based cough syrup.

If guaifenesin is not enough to control the cough I put them on the narcotic cough suppressant, "Hycodan".

Humidifiers help clear mucous from the throat allowing the dog to breathe easier.

Dogs that are frequently exposed to other dogs should receive a kennel cough vaccination every year.

Show dogs may need it more frequently.

The intranasal vaccine is more effective than injectable products.

Vaccinating a dog the day it goes to the kennel is valueless – it takes a good week to ten days for the vaccine to protect your dog

**Kennel Cough vaccines exist in two forms;**

One that is given by [injection](#) and one that is given as drops placed in your dog's nose (Intra-Trac 3, Bronchi-Shield III ).

The injectable vaccine is of little or [no value](#).

If the intra-nasal vaccine is accidentally give to your dog by injection, the result can be a very severe reaction.

Some vets still use the injectable product because frees them from this concern.

**Collapsed trachea:**

Toy breeds of dogs are very prone to a genetic abnormality called tracheal collapse.

I believe I have seen this problem in more Pomeranians than any other breed.

The trachea is made up of cartilaginous rings in the shape of a sideways "C" with the open space to the top.

In collapsing trachea the inner soft portion of the windpipe is sucked into the airway during inspiration - partially blocking it.

With time, the lining becomes inflamed, causing a chronic dry, hacking cough.

You can diagnose this condition by massaging the trachea near the dog's chest for a minute or two.

Dogs with this problem go into a coughing spell as soon as you finish the massage.

But your veterinarian should check to be sure other serious problems are not also involved.

When the problem flares up, I place these dogs on a cough suppressant and an anti-inflammatory drug such as prednisone until the problem resolves.

Dogs should not receive prednisone or other steroids for long periods if it can be avoided.

Air humidifiers are also helpful.

I suggest these dogs wear harnesses rather than collars and I limit their exercise until the cough is better.

Various surgical techniques are used to attempt to cure this condition.

They meet with mixed success.

### **Migrating hook and roundworm larva:**

Dog hookworms and roundworms can also cause a cough.

We call this a verminous cough.

This problem is primarily a concern in young dogs and puppies coming from unsanitary conditions.

When a dog accidentally eats a hookworm or roundworm larva or egg, the larva burrows through dog's stomach or intestine into the blood stream.

When it reaches the lungs it is coughed up, re-swallowed and then matures in the dog's intestine.

If the dog becomes infested with large numbers of larva due to an environment contaminated with faeces, the owners will notice the cough.

Children in that type of environment are also at risk of serious eye infections.

### **Preventing verminous coughs is a matter of sanitation.**

Dog faeces need to be collected and disposed of properly.

Hookworm larva thrive in damp shaded soil.

One of the best ways to prevent this problem is to keep all your dogs on a monthly heartworm medication that is formulated to kill these parasites as well.

**Allergies and irritants:**

Some dogs, like people, experience throat and nasal irritation due to chemicals in perfumes, cigarette smoke, new bedding, carpeting, etc.

Dust mite allergy is said to occasionally cause coughing in dogs.

This is an uncommon primary cause for coughing in dogs.

Coughing can be a multi-faceted problem and it is quite likely that allergies and irritants have made many of the cases of cough that I see, worse.

**Heartworm disease (in areas prone for heartworm):**

Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes.

Mosquitos that bites an infected dog, ingests microscopic heartworm larva or microfilaria.

When they next bite a dog these larva migrate through the new host's body and lodge in the upper right side of the heart.

Depending on the number of heartworms present and the length of time they are there, the heart is slowly damaged and enlarges.

The presence of heartworms also causes inflammatory changes in the lungs.

These changes, along with pressure from the enlarged heart on the windpipe cause a dry to moderately moist cough.

By the time a cough is present the disease is quite advanced and some of the changes to the heart and lungs are irreversible.

Dogs with heartworm coughs are noticeably ill.

They are thin over their back and their hair coat is dry and musty.

They have a worn-out look about them and are often prematurely grey around their muzzle and toes.

If the disease is advanced, they are potbellied due to an enlarged liver and excess fluid in their abdomens.

They will usually be positive on a heartworm antigen test.

Their cough is worse when they lie down.

These are dog's that did not receive monthly heartworm preventative.

After assessing the degree of damage to the body, I treat these dogs with Immiticide, an arsenic-containing medication that kills the adult parasites.

The "three-shot" technique is safest for your dog.

If the disease has caused marked damage to the liver and heart I try to stabilize and improve the dog's health before the injections.

If that cannot be done I have two alternatives.

I can give a single injection and then place the dog on monthly heartworm preventative or I can just place them on the monthly preventative.

Sometimes that is the safest thing to do.

Although heartworm treatment eliminates all or most of the worms, it will not repair the damage already done to your dog's heart.

### **Heart problems:**

Congestive heart disease.

Coughing is one of the most consistent signs of heart disease.

The most common form of heart disease in dogs begins with damage to the mitral valve on the left side of the heart.

When I listen to the heart with my stethoscope, I can detect abnormal sounds on the left upper quadrant of the heart – the area where this valve is located.

X-rays and ultrasonography of the dog's heart show a typical rounded, enlarged heart shape with the trachea.

Pressure on the trachea pushed abnormally high.

Fluid will also be seen in the dog's lungs.

This fluid and pressure on the trachea are the primary causes of the cough.

The dogs' gums are often bluish-gray (cyanotic) and slow to return to normal color when my fingers pinch them.

The livers of these dogs are enlarged with pooled blood and they may have fluid in their abdomens.

Mitral valve insufficiency is the most common heart disease in older dogs.

It affects over one-third of the dogs that are older than ten.

Early in this condition, placing the pet on the diuretic, furosemide, eliminates the cough and improves the function of a weakened heart.

These dogs do well when placed on a sodium-restricted diet.

As the disease progresses, the dog will need other medications.

One of the most effective medications is the ACE inhibitor, enalapril maleate.

Please read articles [A](#) , [B](#) and [C](#) on this subject.

### **Dilated cardiomyopathy.**

Cardiomyopathy is a form of heart disease that affects larger breeds of dogs.

It is very rare in dogs that weigh less than 15 kg.

The onset of this disease is very rapid.

Dogs begin to cough and show general weakness and exercise intolerance all within a matter of weeks.

When I listen to the chests of these dogs, their heart rate is very fast and weak.

Often the heartbeat is very irregular. . X-rays and ultrasound images of these animal's chest show a huge heart – often with an enlarged left upper chamber (atrium) and the lungs filled with fluid.

I treat this condition similar to congestive heart failure.

Unfortunately, dogs with Dilated Cardiomyopathy will not live long despite everything your veterinarian can do.

### **Tumours in the lungs.**

Hacking coughs in old dogs are also common when tumours are present in their lungs.

These are always sad cases to deal with.

When lung tumours are advanced, dogs may cough up blood as well as phlegm.

Primary lung tumours are very rare in dogs.

These are generally secondary tumours that have moved to the lungs from another location.

Sometimes, if the disease is advanced, abnormal lung sounds or silent areas are present.

But it is X-rays that are needed to identify the problem.

Often the dog's lungs show a shower of small tumours throughout the lung fields.

The most common tumour type is adenocarcinoma.

Although I may refer these dogs on to a veterinary oncologist there is really no effective chemotherapy for dog that I feel is worth the suffering they will experience in chemotherapy or the short extension of their lives that it might bring.

I try to make their remaining life as pleasant as possible with cough suppressants, steroids and bronchodilators such as theophylline and lots of Love.

### **Laryngeal paralysis:**

This is a relatively rare condition in which the structures of the throat (larynx) become paralyzed allowing food and water to enter the lungs causing pneumonia.

These dogs lose their ability to bark.

They have reduced exercise tolerance and occasional fainting spells.

They produce a roaring sound when they inhale.  
Mild cases can be managed with corticosteroids and cough suppressants such as "butorphanol or codeine".  
The dogs need to be kept cool in the summer.  
Severe cases require surgery to widen the dog's airway.

### **Distemper:**

The first sign of this disease is usually a soft, dry cough.  
Many dogs become listless and [run fevers](#) of 39.5 - -40.5 C.  
A thick, yellow discharge from nose and eyes is common.  
Most dogs recovered from distemper during a two-week period.  
But some dogs developed fatal neurological and intestinal disease.  
Because a virus causes distemper, antibiotics do not cure it.  
But we give antibiotics to prevent secondary infections.  
Fluids, good nurturing care and dealing with symptoms as they occur are our only treatment.

### **Lungworms;**

The chief signs of lungworm infections in dogs are coughing and a rise in the number of white blood cells called eosinophils.  
Lungworms y are quite rare in an urban environment.  
Dogs become infected with a lungworm, Filaroides osleri.  
Adults of these parasites live in nodules in the windpipe where they pass living larva, which are coughed up.  
Some are spit out and others re-swallowed and pass out in the stool.  
Pups become infected by eating the saliva or feces of an infected dog.  
These worms are best treated with "fenbendazole (Panacur".

**Bartonella:**

When the diagnosis of the cause of cough in cats remains unclear, a test for the Bartonella bacteria should be run.

Bartonella was recently recognized as being able to cause a wide range of diseases in cats including chronic respiratory tract inflammation.

When present, it is treated with "azithromycin, doxycycline or rifampin".

Please read [Bartonella](#) .