

IT'S A DOGS LIFE!

I was lying on a beach in the Seychelles, soaking up the sunshine, watching the palm trees swaying in the breeze and the dolphins jumping in the ocean. Suddenly this idyllic scenario was shattered as a noisy bell sounded continuously. I awoke from my dream with a start and realised the phone was ringing! It was 3AM on a wet windy night in Somerset and reality quickly returned.

A very worried owner of Jasper, a standard poodle, was on the phone who explained their dog had something stuck in its throat. The dog had been trying to cough it up for several hours but it would not budge. Neither the owner nor Jasper was getting any sleep. On asking the owner what the dog had swallowed she responded that she had not seen it but Jasper definitely had something stuck.

Now this was beginning to ring a bell as I had heard a similar story many times previously. In these cases the dogs did not have anything stuck at all but rather had Infectious tracheobronchitis otherwise known as kennel cough. This is similar in many ways to whooping cough in people and causes an often severe cough which can appear to the untrained eye as an object lodged in the dogs throat that it is trying to cough up.

Kennel cough is caused by a combination of highly infectious viruses and bacteria that will spread rapidly in the air or by direct contact among a group of dogs in the right conditions. It usually presents with a few days of being off colour, then a hacking cough that starts whenever the dog gets excited or exercises.

The cough usually results in the production of white froth, or mucus, which may appear as retching. Generally healthy dogs are not too ill; they may have a mild temperature 103°F (normally 101-101.5°F) and may be a little off their food. The cough will get worse over the first few days then, if untreated, may gradually resolve after three to four weeks. In very young or old dogs, or if there are other illnesses, kennel cough may become more severe and lead to pneumonia. This is very nasty and uncomfortable for the dog and in some cases may result in death.

Predisposing factors for catching and spreading kennel cough:

- [Close contact with other dogs; for instance in kennels, backs of trucks, or at shoots
- [Exercise, excitement and exposure to cold air stimulates the cough and spreads the viruses and bacteria
- [High levels of humidity, such as foggy mornings, warm and poorly ventilated kennels
- [Stress situations such as boarding kennels
- [Mixing with unvaccinated dogs

The disease usually takes about five days from contact with the viruses and bacteria to the start of the cough. Once the cough is there it is important not to do anything to exacerbate it. Therefore avoid excitement, cause for barking and exercise, especially in cold morning air.

Every time the dog coughs it is producing an explosion of contagious particles into the air around it, so do not mix it with dogs who are not your own. Unfortunately, by the time the cough is evident, all of your dogs are likely to have been exposed.

I would always take a dog suspected of having kennel cough to your Veterinary Surgeon. Leave the dog in the car and wait until the vet calls you – try to avoid further spread to any dogs already waiting. In most cases the vet will give the dog something to suppress the cough, this reduces further damage to the airway and allows the body to start the healing process. In many cases, especially those running a temperature, antibiotics will be provided to address the bacterial part of the disease. Unfortunately, as we know with ourselves, a virus must be left to be dealt with by the body's own immune system.

Remember do not take your dog to meet other dogs until it has completely stopped coughing, this can be anywhere between five days and a month.

Kennel cough can be at least partially prevented by vaccination. The normal 'full' booster vaccination will protect against most viruses but does not include the bacteria 'Bordetella bronchiseptica' which seems to be the main cause of the illness. This can be vaccinated against by the

administration of an intranasal vaccine (drops up the nose) which provides cover for 12 months.

In Jaspers case he did have kennel cough and nothing was 'stuck in his throat'! Nor did I get to the Seychelles! He went on to make a full recovery. So don't let your dog become like Jasper; make an appointment with your Veterinary Surgeon now so you can keep your dog healthy this summer

