

Coughing Dog Needs X-Rays

Dog's three-week cough could have several causes, including heartworm, cardiomyopathy, or just a respiratory infection.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. I have an 11-year-old female Rottweiler who has had a productive cough off and on for three weeks. She mainly coughs in the morning and when she's excited. She doesn't have heartworm, and her blood work turned up only a high eosinophil count. What could be wrong?

A. A high eosinophil (EOS) count can sometimes point to an infection with a parasite, but not always. With a moist cough, it would be worth rechecking the heartworm test one more time to make sure she is negative.

Next on the list of possibilities would be congestive heart failure due to a dilated heart. Dilated cardiomyopathy is an enlargement of the heart, with loss of the ability of the heart to contract. It occurs in some large breed dogs. Your veterinarian may be able to detect a heart murmur, and there may be an abnormal EKG.

The best way to confirm or rule out the diagnosis is with chest X-rays and possibly an ultrasound of the heart (echocardiography). The X-rays may show a very large, round heart that extends beyond the normal size, and may be pushing up on the trachea (airway), causing the cough.

Other possibilities are a simple upper respiratory infection and allergic bronchitis. In either case, chest X-rays will be helpful in confirming a diagnosis.