

Dog's Gagging Is Most Likely Kennel Cough

A history of kennel cough points to a reoccurrence.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. I am writing regarding my 1-year-old Sheltie. He had kennel cough six to eight months ago. For about a week now, he has been gagging multiple times a day, at random and sometimes after drinking water. When it is at random nothing comes up, and after drinking, water comes up. He does not seem to be in any distress during these times or any other time. He is eating and getting enough water (evaluated by his elimination). Do you have any thoughts on what this could be? I have opened his mouth and tried to see if anything is stuck in his throat with my finger, but no avail. Thank you for your help, I look forward to hearing from you.

A. I fear the kennel cough has returned. Kennel cough, basically an upper airway infection, can look just like gagging. The irritation to the airway causes the dog to gag and try to clear his throat. This can lead to reflexive gagging, and even vomiting, that can produce some foamy vomit. You may, or may not, notice some coughing to start the process.

A course of appropriate antibiotics combined with low dose prednisone to reduce inflammation of the airway should take care of the problem.

Kennel cough that is persistent, and seems to be getting worse, is sometimes canine influenza. This is a serious upper airway infection that is especially devastating if it gets established in a boarding facility or shelter, because it is highly contagious.

You can vaccinate your dog against future episodes of kennel cough with a Bordetella vaccine. Although this is not 100 percent effective, it can help prevent the disease in dogs that are susceptible, such as your Sheltie.