

Gagging Dog May Have Kennel Cough

Antibiotics and steroids will clear up dog's coughing and gagging.

Jon Geller, DVM

Q. My 1-year-old Boxer was recently put on a round of steroids to help with gagging. He mostly gagged in the early mornings, and occasionally throughout the day. The steroids helped while he was taking them, but now that he's off, the gagging has returned. It started out like a dry cough, so the vet thought it was just a case of bronchitis, or polyps in the throat, but then it turned to more of a gagging. Sometimes he spits up some clear fluid, but not usually. He is otherwise happy and energetic. I am clueless as to what to do next, and the vet is a bit confused as to what it could be. I'm worried and don't want to overlook a serious problem.

A. It sounds like your Boxer has a case of infectious tracheobronchitis, also known as kennel cough. The gagging can be confused with vomiting or stomach problems because it often ends with an unpleasant deposit of vomit and phlegm on your carpet.

Although steroids can help reduce the swelling and inflammation of the throat, an antibiotic with specific activity against the bacteria causing the infection is required. Usually kennel cough is caused by more than one organism, so a broad-spectrum antibiotic is best.

Usually, kennel cough responds to a four-pronged treatment plan: A low dose of steroids to reduce inflammation and irritation A cough suppressant Antibiotics Minimizing excitement and avoiding using a leash that pulls on the neck (use a nose or chest halter instead)

You should give all medications for at least seven days (or as prescribed by your veterinarian), even if the cough clears up, and continue to minimize activity and excitement, or the cough cycle will start all over again.

If your Boxer starts acting sick (lethargic, loss of appetite), he might be developing a more serious form of respiratory disease known as canine influenza. In that case, he would need to be admitted to the veterinary hospital for IV fluids and antibiotics. From everything you have described, he most likely has kennel cough.