

Kennel Sickness

Kennel sickness usually shows as vomiting, diarrhoea, or both, generally within a kennel rather than spreading through the greyhound community, and varies considerably in its severity and recovery time.

Kennel sickness is usually considered to be a group of different diseases showing similar symptoms - of all the illnesses which affect the digestive system, there are a limited number of ways the gut can respond, so the presence of vomiting and diarrhoea gives no clue to the cause, and a single treatment is therefore unlikely to cure all cases.

Possible causes include:

1) **Food sources:** Poultry in particular is often contaminated with campylobacter and other organisms which can also affect humans. Great care should be taken with hygiene in preparing poultry; it should always be cooked, and care taken to avoid contamination of fridges, freezers, kitchen areas and prepared food with run-off from raw meat. Knacker meat may also be contaminated with bacteria. Complete diets, biscuits and cereals which are stale may be infested with mites to cause diarrhoea, so stock should be rotated and out of date food avoided.

2) **Bacterial infections:** These include salmonella, campylobacter and clostridium perfringens. Especially because of the potential to infect humans, a definitive diagnosis should be made by laboratory culture of faeces at a specialist laboratory. Antibiotics may sometimes be helpful but the choice of which to use must be made on the basis of laboratory tests. These are the most likely causes of kennel sickness.

3) **Virus infections:** Viruses such as coronavirus and parvovirus can cause gastroenteritis of varying severity. Vaccination is available for both, but the protection given by either vaccine may not be complete. There has been concern about some possible reduced protection from parvovirus vaccine which is under investigation, but until this has been clarified the advice would be that parvovirus vaccine normally gives very high levels of protection and must not be abandoned. It may be more effective to give puppy primary vaccination at a slightly older age than 12 weeks. Even if there is a breakthrough of vaccine protection, it is likely that there will be at least partial protection and a less serious illness. Do not stop vaccinating, including all pups, retired greyhounds and all other dogs in the premises. Those who remember the parvovirus epidemics and the terrible illness and deaths of the '70s will not wish to return to that scenario.

N.B. Antibiotics are not usually helpful in treating viral infections as they have no antiviral effect. It is important to be sure that bought-in pups have valid vaccination certificates identifying the greyhound, dated and signed by the veterinary surgeon.

4) **Parasites:** can certainly contribute to diarrhoea, but are very unlikely to spread amongst groups of dogs in the way kennel sickness does. Dogs infested with parasites are likely to have a more serious illness in response to other challenges than they would if properly treated for parasites.

In the following advice, greyhounds are called 'dogs' as all dogs of any breed on the premises are likely to be equally affected. There does not appear to be any infection which is limited to any particular breed.

- Record all illness in your treatment book, including date of onset, contact with other dogs, duration of illness, symptoms, treatment and if effective how long it took to be effective, and the final outcome and show this your veterinary surgeon. It can be difficult to remember the details otherwise in a busy kennel.
- Use your isolation facilities effectively. With one case, isolate it immediately. This may be a dedicated kennel, or part of an area set aside. Mark it clearly and instruct staff what it means. This dog should be fed last, groomed last, all its feeding bowls and equipment kept completely separate. Faeces, vomit and bedding should be burnt at a high temperature or disposed of as clinical waste in sealed bags. It is best if a member of staff can be allocated to look after the isolated dog only and not have any contact with any other dog. Take great care to prevent run-off in to uncovered drains, and exterminate rats, mice and flies so they cannot spread infected material. Your veterinary surgeon or stipendiary steward can give plenty of detailed information on how to isolate effectively, depending on the individual circumstances.
- When the patient has recovered, take advice from your veterinary surgeon as to when it is safe for it to mix with unaffected dogs, as it may be a carrier of infection even after it looks well. Recovered dogs can be mixed with each other.
- Proper isolation can often prevent a single infected case spreading through an entire kennel and is well worth the effort.
- If there is MORE THAN ONE DOG AFFECTED, if you haven't already called your vet, this is the time to do so. This may need proper

laboratory work-up to identify the exact cause of the problem, and will be very cost-effective, as treating an entire kennel with the wrong treatment is not only expensive but leaves the problem still in existence. Discuss the kennel problem with your veterinary surgeon, who is the best person to advise you.

- If you are having difficulty dealing with the problem, your stipendiary steward will always be prepared to help and advise.