

Should doxycycline be used preemptively for kennel cough?

A rescue that transports dogs asks if they should start dogs on antibiotics just in case they may get kennel cough. Dr. Wilson explains why this is not advised.

Question:

I take dogs from the county shelter and place them in foster homes for 2 weeks prior to transport. Occasionally, one of the dogs comes down with kennel cough. Since I have time limitations, would it be any benefit to putting these dogs on doxy as soon as they enter foster care? Also, if antibiotics are not recommended, are there immune boosting products you would recommend that I could give to these dogs?

Answer:

These are excellent questions! I know how frustrating it can be when kennel cough delays placement or adoption of a dog. Unfortunately, prophylactic or preventative use of antibiotics for kennel cough – while appealing in theory! – is generally not recommended.

“Kennel cough” (which is also referred to as Canine Infectious Respiratory Disease Complex, or CIRDC) can be caused by bacteria or viruses – and regardless of the cause, the clinical signs are usually pretty much the same. Without diagnostic testing, it’s very difficult to distinguish a “bacterial” kennel cough from a “viral” kennel cough. Since antibiotics like doxycycline treat only bacterial infections – and many cases of kennel cough are caused by viruses – there’s a good chance that an antibiotic would not be helpful. In addition to likely being ineffective, prophylactic antibiotic treatment may lead to antibiotic resistance, which in turn could ultimately contribute to the emergence of antibiotic-resistant CIRDC in the future.

While there are no proven immune boosting products, studies have indicated that vaccination and stress reduction can lead to a lowered risk of CIRDC. The link below provides further information on these topics, as well as a more thorough overview of CIRDC.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any further questions or concerns.

<http://www.uwsheltermedicine.com/library/resources/canine-infectious-respiratory-disease-complex-cirdc-a-k-a-kennel-cough>

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