

Question: We have a 2-year-old poodle that coughs a lot then she spits out a yellow foamy liquid. What's wrong with him?

Answer: A cough in a dog can be caused by many things and is never normal. A productive cough, where a liquid or phlegm is produced, may be an indicator of a more serious problem than other causes of cough. A few causes of cough in dogs include kennel cough, pneumonia, heart disease, and collapsing trachea.

Kennel cough, also called infectious tracheobronchitis, is often caused by a bacteria called *Bordetella*. This bacteria is spread quickly among dogs in close quarters at a kennel or animal shelter. The bacteria cause inflammation of the lining of the upper airways. A cough will usually start 2-3 days after exposure. Most dogs with kennel cough will cough for a few days. They may cough so much that they retch and gag up the mucus that lines the respiratory tract. Often supportive therapy is recommended for a kennel cough infection. Antibiotics and cough suppressants may be prescribed on a case by case basis. Kennel cough can be so severe it progresses into pneumonia. Pneumonia requires more aggressive antibiotic therapy. Dogs with pneumonia often have a fever, are lethargic and not eating. They need to be managed very closely by your veterinarian.

In advanced heart disease fluid can start to accumulate in the lungs as the heart is not working properly. This fluid can cause shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. Dogs may also cough as a result of the fluid. The size and the shape of the heart may change so that it starts to put pressure on and elevate the trachea. This change can cause a dog to cough as well. Coughing may be the first indication of heart disease in your pet.

Collapsing trachea is a disease commonly seen in small breed dogs. The trachea is made up of cartilage rings in the shape of a "C". When the C loses its curvature, the membrane that connects the C becomes weak and floppy. When the dog breathes, the membrane folds in and occludes the airway resulting in a cough. Panting and excitement make this condition worse. Cough suppressants, bronchodilators, steroids and limiting episodes of excitement can help manage this condition.

This is just a brief overview of some of the conditions that can cause a dog to cough. There are many others that should be discussed between you and your veterinarian. We hope you are able to see your veterinarian soon.

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