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Canine cough surge: Vets urge vaccination

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When Rachel Welbeloved's family dog Cooper started making a strange hacking noise, she thought he was trying to vomit.



But when the behaviour persisted all through the night, she called up her veterinarian the next morning and played them a recording of Cooper's strange hacking. There was no doubt in the vet's mind, Cooper had the dreaded canine cough.

The 21-month-old german shorthaired pointer/labrador/greyhound-mix from Christchurch is just one of possibly thousands of dogs across New Zealand that have been treated by veterinary clinics over the past few weeks in the midst of a nationwide canine cough outbreak.

Yesterday, the Veterinary Council of New Zealand (VCNZ) warned dog owners to be on the lookout for canine cough symptoms and urging them to get their dogs vaccinated "as the virus is having a resurgence across the country".

Veterinarian and VCNZ professional adviser Seton Butler said veterinary clinics across the country reported an increase in dogs with symptoms of canine cough.

"We started hearing about a significant number of cases being seen about six to eight weeks ago," said Butler. Determining exactly what caused the resurgence in canine cough was tricky, said Butler. "We had school holidays over the Easter period, so we've probably had an increase of dogs going into kennels or mixing with other dogs over the break period."

The clinical name for canine cough is canine infectious respiratory disease (CIRD) or infectious tracheobronchitis. It is often referred to as kennel cough because of its highly contagious nature and dogs sometimes being infected while staying at kennels, but it can spread anywhere via aerosol between dogs through sniffing, sharing water bowls, and coughing and sneezing.

Symptoms include a loud and highpitched cough that often sounds like there is something stuck in the dog's throat, loss of appetite, low energy, retching or hacking, and nasal discharge.

In a small number of cases, canine cough can lead to pneumonia or a dog becoming seriously ill.

Luckily, Cooper recovered from canine cough without becoming seriously ill, said Welbeloved.

"He needed a cough suppressant overnight to make him comfortable – and it lasted the full 10 days . . . not a lot of energy and he had to have a few days of rest without any walks."

Butler said a dog that has been vaccinated against canine cough was less likely to become severely ill.