

TONSILLITIS IN DOGS

I know that children have tonsillitis, but I did not realize that dogs do. Is it common?

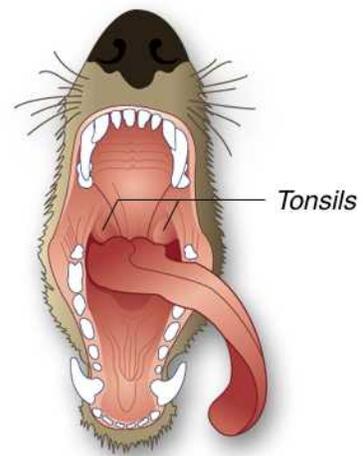
Since dogs have tonsils, they can also develop tonsillitis. It is more common in small breeds of dogs than in large dogs.

What are the tonsils, and what do they do?

The tonsils are much like lymph nodes. There are two tonsils located in the back of the throat. When they are normal, they are not easily seen because they reside in *crypts* or pouches. Similar to lymph nodes, their job is to fight infection. When they are doing this, they may become infected themselves and will enlarge. Swollen, red tonsils that are out of their crypts are easily seen in the back of the throat.

How did my dog get tonsillitis?

There are certain conditions known to cause tonsillitis. Chronic vomiting, a chronic productive cough, and chronic disease in the mouth will allow bacteria to infect the tonsils. The main cause of chronic disease in the mouth is tartar accumulation on the teeth and the bacterial infections associated with it. Occasionally, primary tonsillitis with no underlying cause will occur. This condition almost always occurs in small breeds of dogs.



What are the clinical signs of a dog with tonsillitis?

When the tonsils enlarge, they are usually quite painful. This causes the dog to gag, as if something is in the throat, or to make exaggerated swallowing motions. Some dogs appear to be licking their lips repeatedly. Most affected dogs are reluctant to eat because of the pain associated with swallowing. They may be hungry and go to the food bowl but refuse to eat. Many dogs with tonsillitis are not as active as normal, but they usually do not have fever. This is the one characteristic that differs markedly from people with tonsillitis.

How is tonsillitis treated?

If an underlying source of the infection can be found, it must be treated. Antibiotics are given for two to three weeks in an effort to rid the tonsils of infection and to treat any other infection that may be present. If there is tartar and periodontal disease present, the teeth should be cleaned.

What about a tonsillectomy?

This is not the preferred first treatment, but it may become necessary if there is poor response to treatment or if tonsillitis becomes a recurring condition. Recurrent tonsillitis is more likely to happen in small breeds of dogs.

Is tonsillitis contagious to other dogs or to humans?

Most cases of tonsillitis are caused by bacteria that are found normally in the mouths of dogs and humans. Therefore, it is not contagious unless it is caused by an unusual bacterium.

Can 'strep throat' be associated with dogs?

Streptococcus pyogenes, the cause of "strep throat" in humans, does not cause tonsillitis in dogs. However, dogs can acquire a transient infection with this bacterium when they are in contact with a human with strep throat. Although they do not get strep throat, they may harbor the bacterium and serve as a source of it for other human infections. Therefore, it is suggested that dogs be treated when family members have strep throat, especially if recurring infections occur in the household.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM.
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