

Tonsillitis in Dogs

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

Since dogs have tonsils, they can also develop tonsillitis. Tonsillitis has a fairly low rate of occurrence in dogs, and is more common in small breeds of dogs.

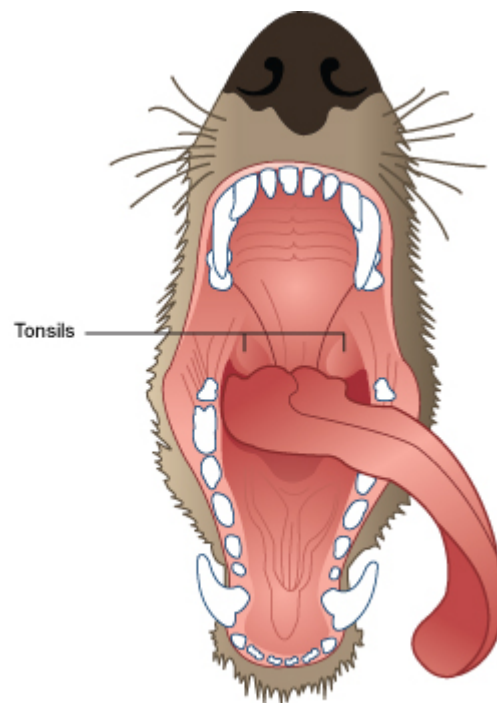
Where are the tonsils and what do they do?

The tonsils are similar to *lymph nodes*, and the role of both of these structures is to fight infection. There is a pair of tonsils located in small pouches or *crypts* at the back of the throat. When they are fighting infection, they may enlarge due to inflammation or infection. Swollen, red tonsils will bulge out of their crypts and can be easily seen in the back of the throat.

How did my dog get tonsillitis?

"Tonsillitis is usually secondary."

Tonsillitis is usually secondary, or occurs as a result of another disease or condition that affects the mouth or throat. 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 (periodontal disease). Occasionally, primary tonsillitis with no underlying cause will occur. This condition almost always occurs in small breeds of dogs.



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What are the clinical signs of a dog with tonsillitis?

When the tonsils enlarge, they are usually quite painful. Anyone who has had a "sore throat" can relate to this. This often causes the dog to gag, as if something is stuck in the throat or to repeatedly attempt to swallow. Some dogs lick their lips frequently. 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, unlike people, they usually do not have a fever.

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 to treat both the tonsils and the primary infection. If there is tartar and periodontal disease present, the teeth should be cleaned. In some cases of primary tonsillitis, anti-inflammatory treatment may help relieve the pain.

What about a tonsillectomy?

Removal of the tonsils is rarely recommended. It is preferable to leave the tonsils intact whenever possible because of their vital role in fighting infection of the oropharyngeal cavity (mouth and throat). A tonsillectomy may become necessary if there is poor response to treatment or if tonsillitis becomes a recurring condition. Recurrent tonsillitis is more likely to occur in small breeds of dogs.

Is tonsillitis contagious to other dogs or to humans?

Bacteria that are found normally in the mouth is the usual cause of tonsillitis. Therefore, it is not contagious unless it is caused by an unusual infection.

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 infection for humans."

Although they do not get "strep throat," they may harbor the bacterium and serve as a source of infection for humans. Therefore, it is suggested that dogs be treated with antibiotics 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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