

Reverse Sneezing in Dogs

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Q. Is reverse sneezing the cause of my dog's funny wheezing?

A. Dogs have a condition we call a 'reverse sneeze.' It may also be known as a 'pharyngeal gag reflex'. It is termed a reverse sneeze, because it sounds like the dog is rapidly pulling air into his nose, whereas in a 'regular' sneeze, the air is rapidly pushed out through the nose. During a reverse sneeze, the dog will make rapid and long inspirations, stand still, and extend his head. A loud snorting sound is produced, which may make you think the dog has something caught in his nose.



The most common cause of a reverse sneeze is irritation of the soft palate, which results in a spasm. This spasm narrows the airway and makes it temporarily more difficult for the dog to take in air. Factors that may be associated with reverse sneezing include excitement, eating or drinking, exercise, physical irritation of the throat such as from pulling on a leash, respiratory tract mites, allergies, irritating chemicals such as perfumes or household cleaners, viral infections, foreign bodies caught in the throat, and post-nasal drip.

If you witness a dog having a reverse sneeze it may seem alarming, but in most cases it is not a harmful condition, there are no ill effects, and treatment is unnecessary. Usually the dog is completely normal before and after the episode. However, in some dogs, especially brachycephalic breeds such as Boxers or King Charles Cavalier Spaniels, sounds similar to a reverse sneeze may be a sign of a respiratory problem, such as an elongated soft palate. In these cases, there are usually other respiratory symptoms as well, and these dogs should be examined by a veterinarian.

A reverse sneezing episode can last for several seconds to a minute. Some claim that an episode can be shortened by closing the dog's nostrils for several seconds with your hand or massaging the throat.