

How do know I have it?

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Symptoms in healthy adult cats can range from none to moderate, usually manifesting as a dry, "hairball like" cough, which may or may not be preceded by vomiting. In the more severely affected kittens, the cough can become progressively more "wet" sounding, exhibiting a "barking" or "whooping" type cough, with the cat struggling to catch it's breath.

Pneumonia can develop rapidly, with the cat seeming fine one minute, and near death 12 hours later.

Young kittens are the hardest hit. They can seem fine when you go to bed, and be dead from pneumonia the next morning. A small snuffle, cough, or runny eye can progress rapidly in 12 hours to a dead kitten. Mortality is nearly 100% in young (under 6 week old) kittens. Older kittens can have copious nasal discharge, be unable to smell or eat, but seem fine otherwise. Mortality among older kittens is closer to 50%.

The most dangerous thing about this disease is the asymptomatic cat! Cats that show no symptoms, and appear healthy even after veterinary examination, have been known to have walking pneumonia!

Diagnosis is made by your veterinarian via a tracheal wash and a culture and sensitivity. Your vet must submit the sample as "canine"--labs have different charts for different species, and Bordetella does not appear on the feline chart!

Bordetella can appear by itself or in conjunction with other respiratory viruses, so individual catteries may experience varying symptoms. It seems to be found most often in conjunction with feline Herpes virus (Rhinotracheitus), with an infection by one weakening the immune system in invitation for the other.