



# Pneumonia in the Irish Wolfhound

## Essential Information for Veterinary Surgeons

**Pneumonia in an Irish Wolfhound is a severe and rapidly life-threatening condition which must be treated urgently.**

It does not present with typical symptoms, so in many cases a dog will die because the condition is not recognized in time to treat it effectively. Another problem facing the breed is that standard treatments may not be enough to save the dog or prevent recurrence. That Irish Wolfhounds are susceptible to pneumonia has been a well-known fact within the breed community for decades, but due to there being a fairly low number of cases, it is quite likely that an owner or vet may not have seen this condition before in this breed. Information on recognizing pneumonia and discoveries relating to its treatment have been shared between breeders /owners for many years. However, the majority of vets may not have dealt with the condition before, unless experienced breeders/owners are amongst their clients. The IW Health Group, representing the four UK Breed Bodies, took the step of putting together this information sheet based on first-hand experiences and the particular effectiveness of certain treatments for pneumonia. This knowledge has been accumulated from outcomes of the many cases that we are aware of and we hope it may be of value both to the vet and the owner - and may save the life of the dog. We would never seek to tell a veterinary surgeon his job, and in these notes we attempt to communicate what has been learned from extensive experience within the breed community; and ask that you consider what we are putting forward. We also beg your assistance in acquiring information for the study into Pneumonia being carried out by Dr. Angela Bodey BSc, BVSc, PhD, MRCVS, who is working with the Health Group collecting case studies, so that we may have proper clinical data relating to this condition. Surveys are being collected on behalf of Dr. Bodey by Miranda Brace who can be contacted on **email: [mirandabraehead@gmail.com](mailto:mirandabraehead@gmail.com)** your help would be much appreciated.

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| <b>Problems facing the Veterinary Surgeon</b>  | <p><b>TIMING:</b> If your client is an experienced Wolfhound owner/breeder, the chances are they have seen this condition before and recognize it. What we ask of you is to believe them, even though the dog might not present with typical symptoms. However, critical delays occur when:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>The owner is inexperienced</u> and may not have recognized the symptoms quickly enough and the dog may have been ill for several days and already in a critical condition.</li> <li>2. <u>The symptoms are atypical.</u> Veterinary surgeons will not necessarily recognize that the dog has pneumonia unless they have seen a similar case before - and will treat for a different condition, thereby losing valuable time. There have been cases recorded where pneumonia has been misdiagnosed as heart failure.</li> </ol>   |
| <b>The Symptoms</b>  | <p>The symptoms come on very suddenly <u>often without obvious cause.</u><br/>         The dog has difficulties in breathing – yet shows <u>no lung congestion.</u><br/>         Its head is lowered and stretched forward level with the back; whether standing or lying in a ‘sphinx’ like position the neck is extended to expand the airway as much as possible.<br/>         The dog will be reluctant or unable to lie on its side.<br/>         The dog may or may not be coughing.<br/>         The temperature <u>may</u> be very high – but many dogs do not have a raised temperature and this can be misleading.<br/>         There have been cases of pneumonia in wolfhounds following a lungworm infection.</p>  |
| <b>X-rays</b>  | <p>One of the most misleading issues in diagnosis is that the <u>lungs are likely to appear clear</u> on X-ray.<br/>         Case studies have shown that lung congestion may <u>not</u> show on an X-ray for five days or more from when the above symptoms are seen; by which time the dog is seriously ill and this is when many deaths occur.<br/>         Cases where dogs are showing severe lung congestion on X-ray have often been referred to a specialist practice for procedures such as a lung wash, as more intensive treatment is required.</p>  |
| <b>Treatment</b>   | <p>The severity of this condition means it must be hit hard with antibiotics - intravenous Baytril and Antirobe as soon as possible, also anti-inflammatory. Antibiotics by tablet are unlikely to work quickly enough. Treatment must continue for at <b>least 6 weeks</b> otherwise the condition often recurs.</p>   |
| <b>Critical Timing<br/>This is where we are asking the co-operation of the veterinary surgeon.</b> | <p>If there is no significant improvement <b>within 24/36 hours</b>, the condition will continue to worsen and the lungs can become congested leaving the dog in imminent danger of dying. It is at this point that we ask you to consider adding in a treatment which has proven itself effective against pneumonia and has proven effective against the common cases of relapse into the ‘pneumonia cycle’ as dogs who have suffered pneumonia once, are likely to get it again.</p>  |
| <b>Excenel as a Treatment</b>  | <p><b>Excenel given at a daily dosage of 4.5ml subcut, combined with Antirobe</b> has been the most successful treatment for Wolfhound pneumonia. It is the <b>ONLY</b> cephalosporin drug on which we have data based on the experience of owners and breeders working with their vets, having used this drug successfully. Excenel is a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation cephalosporin used for <u>respiratory conditions</u>, but not licensed for use in dogs in the UK. We understand that vets, by law, need to follow the Cascade system, but clients will be willing to sign an off licence form. Using other 3<sup>rd</sup> generation cephs. may not have the same benefit, for example Convenia has been used without effect, but then it is not a respiratory drug. Although we appreciate the reluctance some vets have in using off license drugs, the severity of this condition does not allow time to experiment with alternatives and we feel strongly that a Wolfhound should not die from pneumonia without every attempt being made to save it.</p> |
| <b>Period of Treatment</b>   | <p><b>It is essential that any treatment given continues for at least 6 weeks after diagnosis.</b></p>  |
| <b>Safety levels of Excenel</b>  | <p>We are not aware of any negative side effect from using Excenel. We understand from Zoetis that Excenel is marketed as Naxcel in America and information on safety margins for dogs can be found on their website.</p>   |



# Pneumonia in the Irish Wolfhound

## Essential Information for Owners

**Pneumonia in an Irish Wolfhound is a severe and rapidly life-threatening condition which must be treated urgently.**

The Irish Wolfhound Health Group has put together this Guide to Pneumonia in the Irish Wolfhound in response to a growing number of **deaths**, misdiagnoses and misunderstanding of the condition in the breed.

In America the drug of choice for wolfhounds is Rocephin (ceftriaxone), a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation cephalosporin, which is not licensed in the UK.

**Excenel is the drug recommended by wolfhound people in the UK**, who have had experience of pneumonia. Excenel is also a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation cephalosporin, available in the UK, licensed for pigs, but not licensed for dogs. To obtain it, a waiver can be requested from your vet, by you as the owner of the dog, to be signed by you, authorising the use of Excenel as an off-license drug.

**Note on Dosage:** Anecdotal evidence suggests Excenel is given as a 4.5ml subcutaneous injection every 24 hours – and is often combined with Antirobe. This dosage is based on experience and a history of success using the drug for pneumonia in the Wolfhound. It has been observed that treatment length can vary from five days to six weeks, depending on the severity of the infection. It is strongly recommended that you discuss your dog’s requirements with your veterinary surgeon, ideally before the need for it arises, as not all veterinary surgeries will keep Excenel in stock.

**Note to Veterinary Surgeon:** Excenel is marketed as Naxcel in the US. Naxcel is licensed for UTI’s in dogs, information regarding Naxcel can be found on the Pfizer website.

**Wolfhounds are unique in their presentation of pneumonia. They may have a normal temperature and their lungs may appear clear on x-ray for several days after the dog first shows signs of illness**

There have been a number of cases of Vets misdiagnosing pneumonia as heart failure. If your wolfhound has clear lungs, does not have a raised temperature, but does have atrial fibrillation, some Vets will put the difficulty in breathing down to heart failure, and treat that, not the pneumonia.

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| <b>Recognizing pneumonia</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sudden onset.</li> <li>• Difficulties in breathing.</li> <li>• Head lowered and stretched forward level with the back, neck extended to expand the airway as much as possible.</li> <li>• Dog reluctant/unable to lie on its side.</li> <li>• Dog may or may not be coughing</li> <li>• Temperature may be very high – but a normal temperature does not necessarily preclude a diagnosis of pneumonia.</li> <li>• Their lungs may appear clear on x-ray.</li> <li>• There have been cases of pneumonia in wolfhounds following a lungworm infection. (Lung worm is no longer restricted to the south of England, and is present in most areas)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Treating pneumonia</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>URGENTLY!</b> if there is any doubt, treat with the antibiotics first, and argue later – do not take a wait and see attitude.</li> <li>• Most Vets will want to administer an antibiotic intravenously, as it is important to hit it hard and fast.</li> <li>• Fluids intravenously should be considered – but care should be taken if your wolfhound has a heart condition.</li> <li>• Excenel is the drug recommended by wolfhound people who have had experience of pneumonia in the UK.</li> <li>• Other antibiotics have been used – Ceporex, Baytril and Antirobe, Cefuroxime, Zithromax, Marbofloxacin and Trimethoprim sulfa, but there is a better chance of preventing a recurrence with Excenel.</li> <li>• <b>Drug treatment needs to continue for at least 6 weeks.</b></li> <li>• Steam and coupage can assist in moving the congestion from the lungs</li> <li>• If your wolfhound has had pneumonia, it is more likely to have it again.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Convincing/alerting Vets</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>BEFORE THIS HAPPENS – Please have a conversation with your veterinary surgeon to ascertain their views on using Excenel should the situation arise. When a dog is already sick, it is not a good time to find out that your Veterinary Surgeon will not consider alternative treatments from the mainstream.</b></li> <li>• <b>Your vet will want to start with standard treatment first – intravenous Baytril and Antirobe tablets - should there be no improvement in the dog within 24 -36 hours we strongly advise the vet incorporate the Excenel treatment.</b></li> </ul>  |

The IWHG is a UK body that was established in 2004 specifically to look at health issues in a unified way across the breed. None of the members is a qualified veterinarian: any suggestions made are based purely on the personal experience of those wolfhound owners who have had to use the drugs mentioned and are a guide only for you to discuss with your own vet. It is the responsibility of the owner to make a decision on any course of action they take with their hound and we strongly recommend that this is done in conjunction with your vet.