



Insect stings and/or bites in pets

The lovely warmer weather of spring and summer brings it downsides with a lot of biting and stinging insects which dogs and cats often like to chase.

It's only natural for our dogs to rush around with their noses on the ground picking up all those lovely new scents when they are out on a walk or in the garden and this is when they are very likely to be stung. Cats like to chase insects in the home as well as outside and again this is when they are likely to be stung.

You may even hear your dog let out a yelp when they have been stung. The result could be a slight and soft swelling on their face or muzzle, although many dogs get stung on their paws too.

If you own a dog with a short coat, you may even see a few raised bumps and blotches on their body as well, often called 'hives' which is an *allergic* reaction.

Stings on paws are common

Dogs are commonly stung on the paws/pads, the result of which is a sting on their pads as they step on the insect. When this happens it's a lot harder to see and remove the **stinger**.

However, your dog may be limping and looking a little sorry for themselves which all too often owners think is a result of some sort of injury to a joint or a torn nail when in fact it's an insect sting that's causing the problem.

When dogs get stung on their paw pads, they tend to nibble and chew at their foot because it is itchy and mildly painful.

Your pet will feel a little discomfort - but an insect sting is not a terribly serious problem for the majority of dogs.

Some dogs, however, may have a more serious allergic reaction or if they get stung on a more sensitive area like their mouths it can be more serious.

Dogs can suffer allergic reactions to stings

If your dog does suffer an allergic reaction to a bee, wasp or other insect sting, it might cause their windpipe to swell up which in turn can make it very hard for them to breathe. If the swelling continues, it may even cut off their windpipe altogether which means they can end up by suffocating.

This is why when a dog is stung either on their mouths or throats it's sensible for them to be assessed by us at Hillside Vets as soon as is possible.

Other dogs may be stung elsewhere but still exhibit signs of shock and can become weak and pale and may also vomit

With this said, treating a sting on a paw pad or elsewhere on your pet's body is pretty straight forward if they do not seem to be reacting.

Wasp stings typically do not leave stingers behind but if the sting was from a bee, the chances are the stinger will be left in your pet's body. Sometimes you can see it sticking out and it may even be pulsing.

You should try to remove the stinger if you can (with the edge of a piece of card or plastic for example) before neutralising the stinging sensation your pet is feeling with the right sort of antidote (see below).

How to ease the irritation

The best way to ease the itchiness and irritation of a sting is to place an ice pack or a cold compress on the affected area. If you do not have these things available then simply rubbing the site will cause a release of natural chemicals (endorphins) which will help relieve the pain and discomfort.

If your pet has a nasty reaction to the sting and you visit us at the surgery, we may well prescribe an antihistamine or steroid treatment.

Wasp stings are known to be alkaline and bee stings acidic and there are many discussions that the addition of vinegar to wasp stings and bicarbonate of soda to bee stings will help to neutralise them. We would point out that there is no scientific basis to this and it's unlikely to work.

First Aid Kit

For those of you that carry a first aid kit with you on your walks (we sell these at the surgery if you are interested in purchasing one) it is worth considering carrying some antihistamines with you which you could give to your dog immediately after a sting.

There is not a dog specific antihistamine but at Hillside Vets we commonly use chlorphenamine and if you would like to discuss or explore this option and the appropriate dose for your dog then please contact us at the surgery for advice.

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