

STINGS AND BITES

While an encounter with most of New Zealand's 'nasties' will only result in a mildly painful reaction, some of our dogs have died from what their owners thought was a spider bite but was in fact a bacterial infection. *Any* penetrating wound can get a secondary bacterial infection which can be severe and even fatal. In these cases quick administration of antibiotics can save your dog's life. So if your dog is having a severe reaction to something and you're not sure what it is then a trip to the vets is essential.

BEES & WASPS

When bees or wasps sting, they inject venom through their stinger into the skin of the victim. Wasps have stingers without barbs that are usually retracted upon stinging which means these insects can sting multiple times. The honey bee has a barbed stinger that remains in the victim's skin with its venom sack attached.

Most animals will have only a localised reaction to a bee sting. In a **normal reaction** the skin is reddened and painful. Swelling and/or itching may also occur but the pain usually disappears over a few hours. In the so-called **large local reaction** to an insect sting, the swelling, redness and pain may persist for up to a week. Areas adjacent to the site of the sting may also be involved.

In a **systemic allergic reaction**, the entire body is affected. The victim may develop hives, redness or swelling at sites on the body distant from the site of the sting. Symptoms can also include vomiting, nausea, diarrhoea and dizziness.

Stings in the mouth or nose, may require emergency medical attention, since they can lead to swelling that can interfere with breathing.

TREATMENT

1. **Determine if the stinger is still present** (look for a small black dot at the sting site) and remove it immediately if it is visible in the wound. A hard object like a credit card or blunt knife can be used to swipe over the area and remove the stinger. The honey bee venom sack, which remains in the skin of the victim, can take 2-3 minutes to release all of its venom, so prompt removal of the stinger can reduce the severity of the sting.
2. **Apply ice or cold packs** to the area to reduce the body's inflammatory response.
3. **Clean the area with soap and water**, then apply hydrocortisone cream to the site to decrease the severity of the reaction.
4. **Taking an antihistamine** such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) in tablet form or Claratyne can also provide relief of symptoms. An adult greyhound would take a standard adult human dose.

FACTS

- Bee venom contains formic acid (also known as methanoic acid) but this is not the single active ingredient that causes the pain from a bee sting
- Wasp stings are alkali but once again the venom has so many active ingredients that it is very unlikely that it is the alkali alone that is the single active ingredient that causes the pain
- Neutralising a sting with either vinegar or bicarbonate of soda is unlikely to be effective because the venom from wasps and bees is injected under the skin and after a few minutes spreads deep into the tissues. Putting vinegar or bicarbonate of soda onto the skin surface is unlikely to even get near the venom so no “neutralisation” is likely to take place.
- Rubbing a wound distracts the mind from the immediate pain and promotes the release of endorphins which may reduce the pain.

SPIDER BITES

It is rare for significant problems to result from a spider bite as most spiders in New Zealand are harmless, however the Katipo, Red back and White-tailed spiders can be harmful and should be avoided.

White-tailed spider bites are not considered poisonous to humans. A recent Australian study has shown no evidence linking necrotic ulcers (destroyed skin) to white-tailed spider bites.

If you suspect your dog has been bitten by a spider

DO

- clean the wound with antiseptic or warm soapy water
- place ice on the bite (not directly onto the skin)

DO NOT

- apply pressure to the wound.

STINGING NETTLES

Nettles are plants with sharp hairs on their leaves. If you touch them, these hairs inject irritants into the skin, making it itchy, red and swollen.

TREATMENT

- Wash the area with soap and water as soon as possible to relieve the sting and remove the nettle hairs. If no water is available, clean the area with a cloth or other available material.
- Apply a paste of baking soda and water.
- Avoid scratching or rubbing the itchy areas.
- Apply cold compresses.
- Antihistamines such as Telfast, Claratyne and Phenergan may relieve itching and swelling. A cream with hydrocortisone will reduce inflammation. You can get these from your pharmacy.

JELLY FISH

For all jellyfish stings except bluebottles which are not true jellyfish so different rules apply to treatment.

TREATMENT

- Apply wet sand or a towel soaked in sea water. If tentacles are still sticking to the dog's skin, don't try to pull them off.
- If you are able to warm up some sea water, pour this over the area (even urine is better than nothing!). If you can get vinegar, pour this over the stung area.
- Do not apply fresh water as this will activate the stingers.
- Wait five minutes and then wipe the tentacles off with a dry towel. Be careful not to get stingers on your hands – wear gloves if you have some.
- Apply cool compresses to the affected skin.

BLUEBOTTLES

- For bluebottle stings, immerse the stung area in warm water (45°C) for 20 minutes.
- If necessary, give pain relief such as aspirin, 300mg twice daily for two to three days. This is the low end of the dose rate and is unlikely to have adverse side effects.

Antihistamines such as Telfast, Claratyne and Phenergan may relieve itching and swelling. A cream with hydrocortisone will reduce inflammation. You can get these from your pharmacy.

Do NOT apply vinegar to blue bottle stings