

Ask A Vet: Spider Bites

Sunday, June 15, 2014

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I had to take my dog to the vet last week for a nasty spider bite. I did not know that a little bite could cause such a reaction. I may have taken him sooner had I known how serious of a problem it can be. Thank you.

-Bitten by Ignorance

Dear Bitten,

Thank you for bringing this topic up as this is the time of year we see a lot of bites not just from spiders but other crawly creatures like ants, bees, mosquitoes, fleas, ticks, and chiggers. Great spots for these critters to hang out are exactly the places where a nosy playful dog likes to investigate like trash bins, porches, bushes, gardens, barns, tool sheds and so forth. A small bite may get overlooked very easily and the extent of the bite may not manifest itself for minutes to hours. Most insect bites are due to bees, wasps or ants and symptoms can appear as early as 20 minutes after the bite. The most common site for a bite is on the face, head or around the mouth. Inflammation or swelling and pain can occur with this and can take up to or more than an hour to get better. When bees or wasps sting, the dog may incur redness and swelling and one can feel heat at the site of the sting. If a stinger is left behind from bees, there may be more release of venom from the stinger if not removed properly. We generally recommend using a credit card or something like it to scrape the stinger out. We don't recommend using tweezers as this may contribute to release of more venom from any residual muscle tissue left behind.

Since you mentioned spiders, there are a couple of spiders that you should be concerned about. One is the black widow spider and the other is the brown recluse. The reaction seen with a spider bite can occur as instant as the second it comes in contact with the dog's skin. Most of the common spiders cannot get their fangs through the dog's skin, except for the two I just mentioned. Other signs from bites include: swelling of eyelids, ear flap, and lips, difficulty in breathing from edema and swelling, welts or hives on the skin, wheezy breathing, weakness, unconsciousness, increased heart rate and fever with possible shock. Sometimes one sees cold limbs, vomiting, diarrhea, shaking and collapse. If the animal is having trouble breathing or seems so weak they may collapse, please get the animal to the vet for immediate treatment. Common first aid remedies you can use for the less threatening bites: aloe vera gel applied to a sting to alleviate some of the pain; for small bumps use baking soda and water paste and apply several times with a cold pack or milk of magnesia or calamine lotion to do same; boil Epsom salts with water for itchy paws/skin and finally witch hazel applied often for hot spots.

-Dr. Wanda Schmeltz