

My pet has been bitten by a snake, what should I do?

In the warmer summer months, snakes become much more active and pet owners need to be careful and safeguard their pets from snake bites, plus look out for the warning signs should an animal be bitten.

Dogs will often try to chase or kill snakes resulting in snake bites usually to the dog's face and legs. Cats, being hunters and chasing anything that moves, also makes them quite susceptible to snake bites.

The sort of reaction your pet has to a snake bite is determined by a number of factors: the type of snake, the amount of venom injected and the site of the snake bite. Generally the closer the bite is to the heart the quicker the venom spreads to the rest of the body. In addition, at the beginning of summer, snakes' venom glands are fuller and their bites are much more severe.

The tiger and brown snake are responsible for most of the snake bites in domestic pets. The tiger snakes have a bite that can be fatal to not only pets but humans. Brown snake venom is milder than the tiger snake's. These snakes have a toxin that causes paralysis and also have an agent in them that uses up all the clotting factors that helps to stop your pet from bleeding. Tiger snakes also have a toxin that breaks down muscle causing damage to the kidneys.

Signs of snake bite include:

- Sudden weakness followed by collapse
- Shaking or twitching of the muscles and difficulty blinking
- Vomiting
- Loss of bladder and bowel control
- Dilated pupils
- Paralysis
- Blood in urine.

If you think your pet has been bitten by a snake you should keep them calm and quiet and take them to a vet immediately. The chances of recovery are much greater if your pet is treated early, with some pets making a recovery within 48 hours. Pets left untreated have a much lower survival rate and many die. If your vet is some distance away, if practical, you can apply a pressure bandage - a firm bandage over and around the bite site - to help slow the venom spreading to the heart. Do NOT wash the wound or apply a tourniquet.

If you can identify the snake, tell your vet what type of snake it is - but don't try to catch or kill the snake. If it is dead, bring the snake with you, otherwise there is a blood or urine test that can identify whether your animal has been bitten and the type of snake responsible.

Once the snake has been identified your vet can administer antivenom. Please be warned that antivenom is expensive and can result in a large veterinary bill, so it is best to try and keep your pets safe and away from snakes in the first place.

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