

INSECTS AND SPIDERS

By Leslie Manis, Health/Genetics Chairman, ASTC

[Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of information. However, this is not a substitute for prompt veterinary care. Any similarity to other publications is unintentional. Published online at Sealyhealthguard.org, 11/23/10]

Insect stings and bites are a hazard any time, but especially in summer. Your dog is outside playing or sniffing in a hole in the base of a tree and suddenly something has stung or bitten him. The problem is, you may not know what it was. The symptoms and the environment can give you clues as to what stung or bit your Sealy. Monitor him closely for at least 24 hours to determine if he requires veterinary care, and to provide useful information to the vet.

Mild reactions can include sluggishness, loss of appetite and fever. A moderate reaction is marked by hives (will look like small lumps), swelling and redness around the lips, eyes and neck region and extreme itchiness. This moderate vascular reaction is called urticaria.

Urticaria may progress to anaphylaxis, a life-threatening sudden allergic reaction. Symptoms of anaphylaxis usually occur within minutes of the bite or sting and include sudden onset of vomiting, diarrhea, staggering, a rapid drop in blood pressure and swelling of the larynx causing airway obstruction. This is extremely serious and requires immediate emergency care. Fortunately, most dogs experience moderate swelling or hives only.

If it is a bee sting and the stinger was left behind, remove the stinger with tweezers, or scrape it out, moving parallel to the skin to avoid pumping any more venom into your pet. Make a paste of baking soda and water and apply an ice pack to relieve the pain. The enzymes in meat tenderizers help break down poison in stings, reducing irritation. Plain Benedryl (diphenhydramine) can help reduce a reaction, but may not always be enough. Ten mg for dogs under 30 lbs (one adult Benadryl is 25mg) is usually recommended. As with any medication, please consult your veterinarian. If the dog has multiple stings, hives, major swelling or problems breathing, seek emergency vet care immediately.

The stings of centipedes and scorpions cause local reaction and at times a severe illness. The bites heal slowly.

One troublesome insect is the fire ant. There are many species of fire ant, some native and some from South America. They can be red, black or brown with a red bottom and look like a large ant. The ones from South America have few natural enemies here and can quickly proliferate. It is said that heavy use of fertilizers decrease natural bacteria that also inhibit fire ants. Beneficial nematodes are critters you can purchase at your natural garden center. They eat many insect larvae, including those of fire ants.

Fire ants can be found in open sunny areas like crop fields, pastures, parks but also under logs and trees, under buildings or near heat sources like fireplaces. They form and live in mounds. If a grassy area is cut, the mound can be leveled and the ants disturbed, leaving an innocent oncomer open to attack! When disturbed, these insects can even spray their venom!

These mounds lead to intricate underground tunnels. Because they can attack in such large numbers, they can be very dangerous to small pets.

Do not ever spray them with a hose if they have attacked your Sealy. They will latch on with their jaws. Administer Benadryl and see your vet immediately.

The bites are painful (burning sensation, hence the name) then itchy. A baking soda paste and ice packs can be helpful. The bites form pustules and can later become infected, so monitor them closely.

Another worry is spider bites. One would hope our dogs are furry enough to avoid spider bites, but it can happen. Often the spiders (such as the brown recluse and black widow) are not aggressive, but can bite if sat or lain upon. The brown recluse is present throughout the US, especially in the south. They like leaves, rotting wood, attics, basements and laundry. They are not aggressive. The type of venom is has is not clearly understood, but it destroys tissue around the bite.

There is no antivenim available for this spider. Often the bite is not noticed at first, but then becomes reddened and an open wound may develop. Your dog may experience nausea and fever. There may be pain at the bite and a dark center. See your vet for treatment.

Diagnosis is made by appearance of the skin and access to spiders. You may have to continue to keep the wound clean and help clean off any dead tissue. It may take weeks to heal.

The black widow is also found throughout the US, but mostly in the south and west. They are also non-aggressive. They like to live in woodpiles, under eaves and in work areas where debris has accumulated. They build webs and people may walk into them. Pets may disturb a nest. They have a nerve toxin that can be dangerous to pets. Symptoms include severe pain near the bite, muscle tremors or rigidity, abdominal pain or other cramping or paralysis. Death can occur if the breathing muscles become paralyzed. There is an antivenin available, if not at the vet, then through a hospital. Seek veterinary assistance immediately. The pet can be treated with fluids, get assistance with breathing, and medication to relax the muscles. Most dogs survive with veterinary treatment.

The hobo spider is found in the Pacific northwest. They build funnel webs in cracks and recesses. They may be found in retaining walls, near stacks of bricks or wood, near foundations or indoors between boxes or in closets. They can attack if provoked or if they feel threatened. Its bite may go unnoticed at first, but then a moderate to severe, slow-healing wound will develop. Its bite causes numbness at the wound site as well as other areas of the body. It will be red and harden within 18 hours. A blister will form then break, and the tissue will be damaged as with a recluse bite. See your veterinarian for treatment.

Check around your home and yard for these pests and supervise your Sealy when visiting strange areas. Summer is a fun time, but it's good to be aware of potential dangers and symptoms.

