

POISONology

SAFETY & FIRST AID TIPS FROM THE ARIZONA POISON AND DRUG INFORMATION CENTER

When scorpion meets cats & dogs



What happens if your pet dog or cat is stung by a scorpion? A few years ago, the Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center did a study to learn more about pets with scorpion stings.

We asked callers whose dog or cat had been on the sting to be part of the study. We had 65 dog owners and seven cat owners agree to help out with the study and share their pet's experience.

For dogs: Overall, dogs of all sizes do relatively well. Larger dogs tolerated the sting better and got better quicker than smaller dogs. Just as we find with stings in humans, the smaller creatures appeared to be more at risk than the larger ones. The most common signs seen: yelping, jumping back, limping, head shaking and rubbing, pawing or licking the sting site. The more serious effects, such as tremors, restlessness and changes in breathing, were seen in 39 percent of the small dogs and 13 percent of the larger dogs. The average time that the animals showed effects from the sting was eight hours. Seventy-one percent of the large dogs were much better in four hours, while 61 percent of the small dogs were better in four hours.

What does this mean for your dog? We recommend closely watching your pet for the first four hours after you suspect a sting. All that is needed for most dogs is to provide a safe place to rest until the effects of the sting pass. However, if your pet develops more serious signs listed above, we recommend taking your pet to the veterinarian.

Cats were quite a different story. Over the study period we were able to get information on only seven cats. Are cats stung less often than dogs? Or, do cats hide from their owners after being stung, so no one is aware of their exposure and discomfort? Or do cats develop fewer problems than dogs? We don't know the answers to these questions.

Here is what we learned about cats: The seven cats in our study all showed some type of local effect, such as the yelping, pawing, rubbing, licking of the sting site, shaking of the head and limping. Seventy-one percent of the cats also developed more serious signs, such as tremors, agitation, roving eye movements and changes in breathing.

From our small sample size, it is really impossible to draw any strong conclusions about cats with scorpion stings. However, based on the experience of the few cats we were able to follow, it appears that cat owners should be aware of the potential for harm to their pet, and watch closely, at least for four hours, for any serious signs of poisoning to develop.

Denise Holzman, a certified specialist in poison information at the Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center, conducted the study and is the author of this article.

Call the toll-free national hotline at 1-800-222-1222 to reach your local poison center. If you live in Arizona outside of Maricopa County, this number will get you to our experts at the Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center in Tucson.