



Manitoba Association of Cottage Owners

Health and Safety

Updated: September 12, 2015

Porcupine Quills in Dogs

Background:

- Porcupines are common in many U.S. states and in all parts of Canada. They will tease a dog into attacking them, and when the unlucky dog takes the bait he will find his mouth and body full of porcupine quills. Quills are attached to the porcupine's skin, much like a hair but not deeply rooted, and has small reverse barbs near the sharp tip of the shaft. When a quill penetrates the skin of the victim, the muscle movements draw it deeper, and the angle at which the barbs are set prevent it from backing out of the flesh. Hunters are commonly faced with the dilemma of how to remove porcupine quills from dog tissue.
- When attacked, a porcupine will often cause brutally painful and acute injuries. An aggressive dog may pick a porcupine up in its mouth and shake it from side to side. As the porcupine flops against each side of the dog, it will release quills into the dogs skin again and again, each time it hits the dog's sides. The angry porcupine will also thrash its quill-filled tail wildly, slapping the dog's body and legs. The unfortunate dog magnifies his own agony by rolling on the ground and pawing the quills, only driving them further into the flesh.
- The quills are attached loosely to the skin, and when they become embedded in the flesh of the victim, they are pulled loose from the porcupine's skin. It is also important to note that a porcupine will not attack a dog, but will only defend himself.
- If a dog were to tangle with a porcupine in the immediate proximity of a veterinary clinic, then the quill removal would be a simple process. The vet would simply administer an anaesthetic and quickly pull the quills surgically. Unfortunately such convenience is rarely if ever the case. Most veterinarians, when in the woods without surgical equipment, will simply pull the quills with a pair of electrician's pliers.



- No dog owner should venture with his pet into the woods where porcupines are known to live without also carrying a quality pair of pliers. There is simply no time to get the dog from the woods to a clinic when he has been quilled. Chain the dog firmly and get immediately to work with the pliers. This is no time to be timid. Blood or no blood, the quills must be pulled. Get hold of them with the pliers, and get them out of the flesh before they become more deeply embedded.
- If the dog becomes quilled in the woods, stand him up while you pull quills first from the side you are going to lay him on. Next, pull the quills from his mouth. Grab some dirt from the ground, cover your free hand with it, and use it to grasp and hold the dog's tongue so it won't slip. Pull the quills from his tongue. If there are quills in the lips and they have worked their way through far enough to feel the tips on the other side, go ahead and pull them out tip first through the lips. This will be less painful for the dog. After removing the quills from the dogs mouth, tie his muzzle closed to prevent him from biting at the remaining quills. Next remove the quills from around the eyes. Then begin removing the quills from his body, getting the ones from behind his shoulders first to prevent them from working deeper into the flesh and potentially into vital organs. Some quills will likely break off. Leave them and continue working on the rest.
- Quills will continue to work their way through the body if left in the flesh. The ones in the front legs and shoulder will normally move upward, and by the next day some can be felt beginning to emerge through the skin above the shoulder blades. Allowing the quills move to the a point where you can feel the tip through the skin, and then pulling it the rest of the way through is much more advisable then trying to cut them out. If the tip doesn't poke through the skin, make a small nick and extract it. Continue to do this daily until they are all out. The only truly effective method of locating quills is feeling for them.
-

Cautionary Notes:

- The larger working breeds of dogs seem to have the most encounters with porcupines.
- Since dogs are always curious, they are easily prone for further encounters with porcupines.
- While a face full of porcupine quills is very painful for a dog, they should be removed as soon as conveniently possible.
- Dogs that are prone to bite or difficult to restrain should be taken to a veterinarian as he will likely use anaesthesia to restrain the dog.
- If only a few quills are present, they can removed by the owner if the dog is co-operative.

MACO's Recommendations for the Future:

- Owners need to be aware of porcupines and the harm they can cause to their dogs.
- More detailed information on porcupine quills in dogs can be found by "googling" – **Canadian Veterinary Journal/porcupine quills.**

Position of MACO

- None (this note is for information only).