

Know how to react if bees attack your dogs

By Valerie Vinyard

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Bees can be quite a sting operation. And if they do, it's important to be prepared.

Recent reports of dogs getting attacked — and dying — because of Africanized bee stings have prompted concern among pet owners.

"I wouldn't know what to do if my dog was attacked," said Meghan Carack, a 45-year-old owner of two toy poodle mixes. "I've heard all of these terrible stories about killer bees, and it scares me."



Liz Wood owns Got Bugs? Exterminating with her husband, Rick. They get about three calls a week now about Africanized bees, more in the fall and spring.

Liz Wood also is the office manager of Casas Adobes Pet Clinic. Most of the dogs they see that are stung were tied up outside, she said.

"You always need to let dogs have a natural escape," she said. "Like a doggie door, or maybe a shed that they can get into."

Interestingly, Wood is allergic to bee stings, so avoiding them is in her best interest.

"I enjoy working with people and helping people," Wood said. "There's always a risk when you're out there, but when you have a profession that you really enjoy, I'm willing to take the risk.

"The public should not take that risk."

Dr. Heather Connally is board-certified in emergency and critical care and is one of six owners of the **Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson**. As a critical-care specialist, she handles emergencies and more serious cases.

She doesn't see many cases that involve Africanized bee attacks on a dog, but as with humans, all dogs react differently.

"We have animals come in that are only stung once and have welts," said Connally, who has been at the center for 3 1/2 years. "Fortunately, it's not that common, but it's bad when it does happen."

So, how is Africanized bees' venom different than honeybees'?

"It's not that it's different," Connally said. "The (Africanized bees) are just more aggressive in nature."

If your dog is stung multiple times, take it to a vet immediately. Most reactions to bee stings take place within 15 to 45 minutes, Connally said.

She said that dogs can be treated with antihistamines and steroids, or if a dog is in shock, it can get a shot of epinephrine.

Wood is quick to point out that bees are an important part of our ecosystem. "Bees are really necessary in the environment," Wood said. "Unless they are in close proximity to homes, we'd just as soon leave them alone."

We recently asked Wood about bees and their behavior.

Why do bees attack?

"Usually it's to protect their hives. Usually a sound or a color or something has provoked them. It could be dogs barking or children playing.

"When a hive gets a little too full, another queen will be produced, and that queen will split and take some of the workers."

Where are nests most commonly found?

"It could be a crack in a house. . . . We've found them in outside speakers, outside sofas, barbecue grills, in tires, under the eaves of the house. Underneath storage sheds is very common."

How do you avoid them?

"Bees will give you some type of a warning. If bees are flying around your face, that's a warning that you're too close to their hive. People should heed that warning.

"They really have to have a reason to attack you. Once they sting you, they die."

What should you do if bees start attacking you?

"Run. Get into a home or car or someplace like that. You can probably outrun them.

"If you jump into a swimming pool, they will definitely wait for you to come up to for air."

Are bees here year-round?

"They are. The busy seasons are usually in the spring and then late summer. Mid-September into October is usually a very active time, as is the first part of April to the first part of May."

What time are bees most likely to attack?

"They're usually out and about tending their hives during the day. I've never personally heard of an attack during the evening hours."

What do you do if you're stung?

"You do not want to pull the stinger out, because it releases venom. You want to take a credit card or business card and scrape it."

What is one of the biggest myths you hear about bees?

"That all bees are aggressive, and they're not. When they're out foraging, they really don't care what you're doing as long as they don't feel threatened."

How do you kill them?

"It depends where they're located. If they're in a crack, there are different chemicals we use.

"If they're in trees, soap and water will actually eliminate the hive. They actually drown because the bees have a waxy coating, and the soap breaks it down."

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Africanized bees aren't more venomous, just more aggressive.

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ABOUT BEES

- During the spring, the queen lays about 2,000 eggs a day.
- The average size of a colony can number in the tens of thousands.
- When the mother queen flies away from the colony with the bees, it's called a swarm.
- A colony is composed of a queen, sexually undeveloped females known as workers and fertile males known as drones.
- When a bee stings, it loses its barb, which means that essentially the bee bleeds to death.
- All bees have stingers. The queen uses her stinger to kill off other queens. Her stinger is not barbed, so she doesn't lose it and die.

Source: Liz Wood of Got Bugs? Exterminating