

PRESS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Getting to the Point on Porcupine Quills By M. Kathleen Shaw, DVM

With summer in full swing, many of our pets are having more wildlife encounters. One wild animal that can have implications for both our large and small pets are porcupines. Curious horses, cows, and cats and dogs that are roaming can have run-ins with these prickly creatures leading to pain, infection and, if left untreated, death.

Porcupines have approximately 30,000 sharp quills on their bodies and tails, and when these timid creatures are confronted with a potential predator, their only defense is to turn around and quickly slap the animal with its tail, embedding them with quills. Often, dogs will try to bite or paw at the porcupine, leading to a large number of quills becoming imbedded in the face, mouth, tongue, nose, and paws. The quills have sharp barbs that pull the quills deeper and deeper into the flesh of the victim. If left untreated, they can migrate into the chest, throat, heart, or abdomen causing serious illness and even death.

It is important to be aware that a pet that has been quilled by a porcupine is in a great amount of pain and quills require special care in removing since twisting or turning a quill can cause even more pain and damage. Many quills break off at the surface of the skin as the animal paws at its face in pain, causing some to be imbedded underneath the skin. Do not try to cut them off at the skin or to pull them out on your own. Remember, quills are very painful to your pet and even if your dog or cat would never normally bite, if in pain, they may.

If your pet is an unfortunate victim of a frightened porcupine, call your veterinarian immediately. The longer the quills stay in your pet, the more likely they are to be pulled into the skin, become infected, and migrate, causing more complications.

Nearly all pets require sedation to remove the quills. With your pet sedated, your veterinarian can do a thorough exam and retrieve any quills not immediately visible to you. For example, it is very common for dogs to have quills in the back of their mouth, under their tongue, and embedded in their gums. Dogs and cats with very thick fur may have some hidden quills.

To prevent your pets from having an unwanted porcupine encounter, fence in your yard, keep your dogs on a leash, and keep pets inside at night, when porcupines are more active.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 340 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine. For more information, visit www.vtvets.org or call (802) 878-6888.