

# HELP TAKE THE STING OUT OF SUMMER AND FALL

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During the summer months, it seems like there are more dangers lurking around the corner for our beloved Bostons than usual. In addition to the normal pests that we live with throughout the year, we now have a lot more bees, wasps, and in some areas bobcats and other predators, as well as rattlesnakes.

While we try our best to keep our dogs as safe as possible, we simply can't be everywhere all the time, nor can we control the environment. What we can do, however, is be proactive in putting precautions in place, as well as being prepared in the event an unexpected and undesired event occurs.

Since bee/wasp stings seem to be the most widespread problem during the summer, this article focuses on ways to help prevent and treat stings (for our dogs and ourselves). Bees are generally not aggressive insects unless annoyed and they die after stinging as the stinger is barbed, and once stung, the stinger remains in the skin and is pulled out of the bee. Wasps, on the other hand, are predators so are more aggressive and since they do not have barbed stingers, they can sting repeatedly.



Most stings occur in late summer and early fall as this is when the population is the highest and food starts becoming a more scarce. Generally, dogs are stung because of their curiosity. They find a bee/wasp and try to catch and play with it or stepping on one while romping around the yard. These activities sometimes result in a sting on the face or neck, in the mouth or on the pad of the foot. Facial and mouth stings seem to be the worst as it may lead to swelling of the throat, closing off the airway. Stings on the foot or body are generally not as significant unless the dog is severely allergic to the venom.

Symptoms of a severe allergic reaction may include general weakness, difficulty breathing, and acute swelling beginning at the sting site and extending outward. Significant swelling around the neck, throat and head is cause for alarm and you should seek immediate veterinarian care. Interim treatment with Benadryl is described in the Treatment section below, but as they say "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure", so we'll first describe traps, nest destruction/removal, and sting prevention.

**Traps:** There are a number of flying insect traps available at feed stores and general merchandise stores such as Target, Wal-Mart, and K-Mart, as well as some grocery and drug stores. These traps are usually fairly inexpensive and many are reusable. You can also make homemade wasp traps that also work for bees and fruit flies (see [www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Wasp-Trap](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Wasp-Trap)).

Hang these AWAY from the area that your dogs play/reside. If they are in kennels, then hang the traps in a tree at least 15 feet from the kennels, to draw the insects away from the kennel area. If they roam free in the yard, then hang them from a tree near the perimeter of the yard, again, to draw them away from your dog and people in the yard.

**Nest Destruction/Removal:** If you suspect a nearby nest, look for the nest during the day, but do NOT disturb it at this time. During daytime hours, bees and wasps are most active and are much more likely to attack in an effort to defend the nest. Once the nest is identified, wait until early morning or later evening hours when the temperatures are cooler and the insects less active. If you need to use a flashlight is used, cover the lens with red cellophane as insects do not see well in red light and will not be attracted to it. Always wear protective clothing when attempting to remove/destroy a nest. This includes long-sleeved shirts, thick jeans/work pants, gloves, boots, and a hat, preferably with a net to cover and protect the face and neck. Obviously the safest way to "kill" a nest is to hire a professional to take care of it for you; however, most of us are do-it-yourselfers and can purchase a projectile-type pesticide spray to use at night or early morning hours. These projectile pesticides can spray from as far away as 20 feet. Once the nest is saturated, using a thick garbage bag, cover and remove the nest. Be sure to tightly tie the garbage bag closed and dispose of it as soon as possible.



**Sting Prevention:** Although it may sound or look silly, moth balls also repel bees and a few other flying insects. Putting a few moth balls in socks or the feet of pantyhose and hanging them around kennels and yards (high enough up that the dogs can't jump up to get them) will act as a repellent. It is another inexpensive and homemade option.

While going out on hikes, I make a mixture of 50/50 Avon's Skin-So-Soft and water, spray it on the dogs and rub it into their coat. It lasts several days and works as a repellent. I honestly don't know if it repels bees and wasps, but I know it repels flies, fleas, and ticks, and since I have never seen any bees/wasps following us around, I'm assuming it works for them as well.

Bees and wasps are attracted to many perfumes and lotions, so if you plan to be out, it is recommended that you do not put them on – this goes for the doggy perfumes and sweet smelling conditioners we often use for show grooming. As far as human clothing is concerned, stinging Insects (bees, wasps) are definitely drawn to bright and shiny clothing, especially floral prints and black. Other insects (flies, ants) seem to be more attracted to white, green, tan, and khaki colored clothing.

And as tempting as it might be to leave food and most treats out so the dogs can free feed or snack during the day, do not leave dog food outside. It is a personal invitation for flies, ants, and yes, believe it or not, yellow jackets (aka meat bees).

**Treatment:** No matter how hard we try to prevent of harm to our beloved pets and ourselves, inevitably, one may eventually get stung by a bee/wasp. Removal of the stinger should be done carefully. Scrape a firm, flat object, such as a butter knife, ruler or stiff postcard against the skin in the opposite direction of the stinger entry. It should pop out on its own. Do NOT remove the stinger with tweezers as you can potentially inject more of the venom when you squeeze the tweezers to grab and pull out the stinger. It is also helpful to wash the sting site and treat topically with an antibiotic ointment.

Generally, allergic reactions to stings are treated with diphenhydramine, epinephrine, or corticosteroid (vets often treat with dexamethasone and subcutaneous Benadryl). The most commonly used self-treatment is Benadryl (diphenhydramine is the active ingredient). If the you/your dog is severely allergic to the venom, IMMEDIATE action is required to prevent anaphylaxis and possibly death, so seek proper medical attention right away.



Obviously, it is better to be proactive and have any necessary medications available prior to the bee sting occurring, but that is not always possible. If urgent treatment to mild reactions is needed, a dose of Benadryl may do the trick. Be sure that it is just the regular Benadryl as the ONLY active ingredient you are looking for is diphenhydramine; therefore, Benadryl Decongestant, Benadryl for Colds, etc. are all unacceptable. The standard dosage for dogs is 1mg per pound every eight (8) hours, so a 15 lb dog would need a 15mg dosage three (3) times per day, which is the amount typically used for dogs with itchy, runny eyes due to allergies; however, doubling this amount is often recommended for



bee/wasp stings. Please use extreme caution if you/your dog suffer from glaucoma, psoriatic disease, cardiovascular disease, or hyperthyroidism and there may be serious reactions to medications taken to treat those issues. ALWAYS consult a veterinarian immediately if your dog has a reaction to the sting, as a different medical protocol may be necessary for your pet.

If you suspect that your dog may be severely allergic, other options such as a prescription for an EpiPen Jr. (use caution when administering as I believe the EpiPen Jr is dosed for approximately 30-65 lbs mammals and Bostons are significantly smaller than that, so use of the EpiPen Jr could do more harm than good) are available, but check with your vet for the best options for you and your dog.

We cannot protect our Bostons from everything, but we can be proactive in reducing the risks of nature. Let's take care of babies to the best of our ability!

**PLEASE NOTE:** The information provided above is **NOT** to be considered medical advice and should not be used in lieu of veterinarian care.