

WELCOME TO THE DESERT



Arizona is the best state in the union! Where else can you snow ski and water ski on the same day (without suffering from some severe hypothermia?). The air is dry, the visibility is for miles, and the sun almost always shines on our lives. There are, of course, some inherent dangers for our pets living in the greatest place on earth; some of these dangers follow...

SNAKES

There are many species of snakes in southern Arizona and some of them are venomous. Rattlesnake bites can be fatal and there is no home treatment for these encounters. Here are some basic tips should your four-legged friend encounter a rattlesnake:

- Keep your pet calm
- Raise your pet's heart above the level of the bite if possible
- Call your vet or emergency vet and inform them that you are on your way, ASAP
- Do not try and extract the venom yourself
- Do not apply a tourniquet
- Do not apply ice

Do not attempt to clean/shave the area, as this will cause added stress to your pet and could lead to increased damage to your pet's internal organs from the snake's venom. Consider rattlesnake avoidance training to minimize the danger to your dogs - their body language when they sense a snake will help you avoid a bite as well.

COLORADO RIVER TOADS

These toads are mostly active around the monsoon seasons of mid-summer to early fall. They are semi-aquatic and are often found in streams, near springs, and in canals and drainage ditches. They often make their home in rodent burrows and are nocturnal. They secrete a toxin on their skin that acts as an irritant to your pet's mouth, and possess a second toxin similar to D-Lysergic acid (LSD). Pets are most often intoxicated by mouthing the toad or ingesting it. If you see your pet mouthing a toad, immediately begin rinsing their mouth with water. Rinse their mouth from back to front so they do not choke or accidentally swallow the water. Do this for 10-15 minutes and call your vet. If the dog ingests (swallows) the Toad call your vet immediately as drugs to counteract the acid must be administered at once.

VALLEY FEVER AKA COCCIDIOIDOMYCOSIS

Coccidioidomycosis is caused by a fungus that lives in the soil here in the arid southwest. These fungal elements are picked up in the air by winds and have exposed all mammals in our region, regardless of indoor or outdoor status. This disease is both epidemic in and endemic to the Sonoran Desert and

the southwestern United States where the soil is alkaline and the environment is arid. The infectious spores in the air or soil are inhaled by mammals and can damage virtually all organ systems in the body. Animals may clear the disease without treatment, or it may become disseminated (spread throughout the body). The disease may require long-term treatment which can range anywhere from a few months to life (depending upon the animals resolve to medication and condition prior to diagnosis). Coccidiomycosis is not infectious between animals, animals to humans, or even between human to humans unless skin lesions form which causes infected spores to shed from the site of the lesion. Newcomers to this area are at a higher risk of infection although residents can be affected. General signs and symptoms of this disease range from a dry hacking cough, lameness, a general malaise and lack of appetite. Seizures can be seen as the first sign of disease; all symptomology depends on the organs and systems affected. This disease requires a blood test for diagnosis. More information is available in RAG e-Library document C7.

TICK FEVER

Tick Fever or Ehrlichia Canis, is a tick transmitted disease affecting dogs. The brown dog tick carries the organism causing Ehrlichiosis and transmits the disease while feeding on the dog's blood. The best prevention of the disease is to prevent ticks from riding on your dog. This should include checking your dog's skin daily for ticks, and using tick treatments such as Frontline or Advantix. Tick Fever is diagnosed with a simple blood test that is usually sent out to a laboratory. Symptoms of tick fever can range from mild lethargy and fever, to not wanting to eat and nose bleeds. Treatment involves a course of antibiotics and possibly other supportive care. More information is available in RAG e-Library document C8.

BUG BITES/STINGS

Scorpions

There are a number of different species of scorpions in our area. Most scorpions only deliver a very painful, but relatively harmless sting. Some scorpion stings can cause very serious envenomation affecting the nervous system and can cause death, especially to a very young, very old, allergic, or currently ill pet.

BEES AND ANTS

There are various types of insects here in the southwest, such as: fire ants, bees, hornets and wasps. The most common place your pet would be affected would be the head (as in a bee sting) or around/between the paws (for ant bites). Signs of a sting/bite include redness and inflammation to the affected area. The severity of a sting or bite can vary depending on how much venom has entered your pet's bloodstream. Many envenomations from insects will lead to a facial swelling or edema regardless of where the pet was stung. If you suspect your pet has been bitten/stung be sure to monitor your pet for any unusual swelling and or abnormal behavior, and if seen notify your vet or emergency vet at once.

CACTUS

Here in the southwestern U.S. it's hard to miss cactus. There are many kinds of cactus ranging in size, shapes and lengths. Pets can get cactus spines in their feet, nose, eyes or anywhere else on their bodies. If you see cactus quills, and your pet will allow it, try pulling it out using tweezers, pliers, or two

credit cards. If the animal won't allow it call your vet or emergency vet. If the spine goes unnoticed it can become deeply embedded and migrate into the skin and underlying tissue, causing inflammation, possible infection and in extreme cases abscess formation, so a general antibiotic may be prescribed for any cactus trauma to prevent these potential happenings.

HEATSTROKE AKA HYPERTHERMIA

HEAT KILLS !!! Do not leave your pets in cars for even a minute if it is over 80°F. Even with the windows rolled down, the temperature can quickly climb up to over 150°F. Dogs and cats are inefficient at cooling their bodies and must do so by panting -- this raises the humidity of the car and makes the situation even worse. (Besides, it is against the law to leave an animal in a car in Arizona). **All RAGofAZ dogs are required to be inside dogs.** If you have a dog door and the pets are allowed to go outside make sure your pet has access to plenty of clean water and shade. We do recommend pets be allowed inside in the air conditioning, especially if you are going to be away from home for an extended period of time. In addition, hot pavement can burn your pet's feet, so make sure not to walk them on pavement during the heat of the day. If left too long heatstroke can cause neurological damage or death. If you suspect your pet has heatstroke follow these steps:

- Remove your pet from the hot area immediately
- Wet your pet down with lukewarm to cool water
- Do not use cold/ice water, as this may cause hypothermia
- Do not let your pet over-drink water as this may cause even more complications.
- **Call your Vet ... ASAP**

Even if the pet appears to be recovering, take him to your veterinarian. He should still be examined since dehydration or other complications (such as internal organ damage) could be present.

WILD ANIMALS

There are coyotes, cougars, bobcats, wildcats, hawks, owls and javelina sharing our space. All of these animals can attack and even kill small to large dogs and cats. Do not allow your pet to run loose, especially in the evening/night since these times are when predators are most active. Attempt to make your yard animal proof. Do not allow your de-clawed cats to run outside unattended as they have had a major defense/escape mechanism permanently removed and are "easy prey". More information about coyotes is available in RAG e-Library document C11.

FINAL WORDS

The desert is a beautiful place to live; however, there are many dangers you must be aware of for the health and happiness of your pet. The key thing to remember and abide by is that the desert was the home for all of these wild animals and species far before we collectively made the desert our home. These "pests" are not malicious or vengeful and do not mean to cause problems or unrest among us; they are just doing the job they have been environmentally and genetically programmed to do. They are not the intruders, we are. To that end, when paths cross, have the respect for them that they deserve and please do not be vengeful or malicious toward them as they make their desert our desert.

This paper was prepared with the help of a brochure from the **Ina Road Animal Hospital**,
7320 La Cholla Boulevard, Ste. 114
More information is available at www.inaroadanimalhospital.com