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ALLERGIC REACTIONS

What is it? An allergic reaction occurs when the body “overreacts” to a foreign substance or allergen. Almost anything can trigger an allergic reaction. Common sources in pets include: vaccinations, insect stings, new medications, and topical products.

What animals are affected? Both dogs and cats can be affected. Dogs often are presented with mild symptoms while cats tend to exhibit more severe symptoms.

What are the signs? Mild symptoms might include face and muzzle swelling, hives, red and irritated skin, and severe itching. Vomiting and diarrhea might occur as well. Pets with severe reactions (anaphylactic reactions) may develop sudden drop in blood pressure, pale gums and tongue, drooling, vomiting, diarrhea, breathing problems, and collapse. Occasionally, a more mild reaction will progress to a severe reaction. For this reason, we recommend that any pet with a suspected allergic reaction be examined by a veterinarian.

How is it diagnosed? Allergic reactions are diagnosed based on clinical symptoms. Sometimes there is a history of a recent vaccination, an insect sting, or a new medication that was administered.

How is it treated? Mild symptoms are treated with anti-inflammatory and antihistamine medications. If there is facial or tongue swelling, examination by a veterinarian is recommended. When a pet exhibits more severe symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, and breathing problems, evaluation by a veterinarian is necessary. This type of reaction may be life-threatening and medical intervention is recommended immediately. Some pets may require hospitalization for IV fluid therapy and other medications until the crisis resolves.

What aftercare is needed? Generally, no aftercare is needed for mild allergic reactions. On occasion, an over-the-counter antihistamine might be recommended for a few days. If a dog or cat has had a vaccination reaction in the past, it is important to remind the veterinarian of this prior to any future vaccinations. Some pets may need to be “pre-treated” with an antihistamine or vaccinations may be spaced apart over time.

What is the prognosis? The prognosis with mild allergic reactions is excellent. Some pets might have another reaction in the future if exposed to the same inciting cause. If a pet survives the initial phases of an anaphylactic reaction, most will recover. In rare cases, death from acute severe anaphylaxis can occur.

Can it be prevented? It is difficult to prevent an allergic reaction since the source of the reaction often cannot be determined, except in the case of vaccination reactions.