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A snake in the grass - quite literally!

James Elliott BVetMed MRCVS Cert VR and Principal writes about adders..

Dogs are naturally curious and their first instinct is to sniff this unusual creature should they find one while on the hunt for their preferred quarry of rabbits or deer or KFC boxes! This invariably results in a bite on the nose or mouth and a lot of trouble.

Adder venom is a very potent toxin which causes all the blood vessels in the body to leak fluid leading to 'shock'. The venom eventually affects the heart, liver and kidneys and untreated can result in serious illness and even fatality. Adder bites are worse in the Spring as the venom sacks are likely to be full after hibernation. Large breeds of dog can be just as at risk as small breeds.

An 'adder strike' might occur without the owner being aware but the unfortunate pet will become very listless very quickly and a swelling usually develops at the site of a bite.

Veterinary treatment should be sought urgently. If possible, carry the dog to the car or keep on a lead to minimise exertion. Phone your veterinary surgery in advance so they can be prepared for your arrival. Please note, applying tourniquets or sucking out the poison John Wayne style does not help and may make matters worse! Giving anti histamine tablets such as 'Piriton', however, can start to counteract some of the affects of the venom but are not a substitute for proper veterinary treatment.