

Dog Care: If Your Pet is Sprayed by a Skunk

by the American Animal Hospital Association

To your dog or cat, the outside world is a playground, and coming head to head--or head to tail--with a skunk is just one more adventure. For you, the smell of adventure may be a little hard to take inside the house. You can take heart, however--there are ways to banish that skunky smell and welcome your pet back into the living room.

The most important thing to do if your pet has been sprayed is check his eyes, nose, and mouth. If he was sprayed in the face--which is exactly where skunks tend to aim--the chemicals in the spray could cause irritation and inflammation. They could even inflame the lining of your pet's throat and lungs, if inhaled. If your pet was sprayed in the face, rinse his eyes, nose, and mouth with water. If, after rinsing, his eyes look red or he rubs at his face, he should be seen by a veterinarian. The veterinarian can make sure his eyes aren't damaged and prescribe an ointment to soothe the irritation.

If your pet's eyes, nose, and mouth check out okay, the next step is getting rid of the smell. The traditional remedy of soaking in tomato juice can reduce the odor somewhat. It will be more effective if you give him a bath with dog or cat shampoo first. Another home remedy that can cut down on odor is a mixture made of one teaspoon of dish washing liquid and one cup of baking soda dissolved in one quart of hydrogen peroxide (3 percent strength). After thoroughly soaking your pet in the mixture, rinse him with clean tap water.

Commercial products made to remove skunk odor will most likely work better than either of these options, however. Shampoos and sprays that are formulated to neutralize the foul-smelling chemicals in skunk spray are available from your veterinarian and at most pet stores. If you use them according to their labels, you should have a nice-smelling dog or cat again. You may have to cut some of the hair off of a long-haired dog or cat to remove the lingering odor, though, particularly if his fur is tangled or matted.

Once you've cleared the air, you can think about how to prevent this smelly situation from happening again. Skunks can be more than a nuisance; they have sharp claws and teeth that could injure your pet in a fight. Some may even carry diseases that could infect your pet. So, instead of letting your kitty or pooch run loose, you may want to consider fencing in your yard, which will both keep your pet in and unfriendly wildlife out. When your pet gets the urge to roam, you can take him on long walks on a leash (yes, cats too!). Not only will this cut down on skunky-smelling incidents, it will also keep your pet safely away from traffic, hazardous chemicals, construction sites, and all the other dangers he could find outside.



Content provided by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA). Visit the AAHA pet owner Web site at www.healthypet.com for more pet care advice.