

Question: My dog has been licking his paw for a day or two. When I looked between his toes, it is swollen, warm to the touch and he is painful. There is a liquid coming out of the swollen area that was bloody and white. I tried to get him to stop licking it but it's not getting better. What can I do to fix his foot?

Answer: Irritation to the area between the toe causes discomfort for dogs. Sometimes this can be caused by a cut or scratch to the webbed area. Dogs that lick their paws can cause irritation and damage to the skin and the moisture from licking can create an environment where bacteria and yeast thrive. This is a condition that needs to be seen by a veterinarian and treated with topical and sometimes oral medications. Dogs can also develop small tumors or cysts on or between the toes which can be irritating to a dog and cause them to lick the area excessively. The swelling and pain that you are describing is concerning because we often see this when there is a piece of grass seed or other foreign material stuck under the skin of the feet.

Pieces of grass seed or other foreign material that gets stuck under the skin is termed a foreign body. These foreign bodies are similar to when you get a splinter under your skin that you can't get out. Within 24-48 hours the body will try to push the foreign material towards the top of the skin. Swelling, warmth, redness and pain are commonly seen. If your dog has a foreign body, there is likely a draining tract present and so you are seeing a bloody discharge consistent with infection.

Treatment options for foreign bodies in the paw vary, but immediate medical attention is required. Some foreign bodies can cause a dog to develop a high fever and stop eating. These pets need to be treated aggressively with antibiotics and surgical exploration of the foot. Often there is a draining tract that can be explored and followed to where the foreign material is. If the foreign substance is superficial, it may come out once the area begins to drain or once soaked.

A swollen, painful paw with or without drainage should always be seen by a veterinarian. Sometimes we may not be able to determine the exact cause of the problem, but the paw should be examined and appropriate treatment started.

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