

First Aid and Emergency Pet Care

**A Guide to Handling
Emergency Situations
With Your Pet**



VMMSG

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How To Use This Booklet

This booklet is intended to help you deal with emergency situations that arise with your pet, it is not intended to replace professional veterinary care. The information presented will help you handle your pet's condition well enough to get them to a veterinary clinic for an exam and further treatment. The best way to manage an emergency is to be prepared — know where to take your pet and what numbers to call when you have questions. Research this information now, before you need it.

How To Approach An Injured Animal

Approach the animal slowly while talking in a calm, soothing voice. ALWAYS muzzle an animal in pain or have someone restrain the head before examining the injured area. Try to assess the nature of the emergency as quickly as possible. Use the information in this book to help stabilize and transport the animal. Call a veterinarian as soon as possible and seek professional care for your pet immediately.

First Aid Kit

Carrying a few basic items can ease the stress of simple emergencies when away from home. Start with a small collection of the following:

1. Tweezers
2. Sterile saline (contact lens solution)
3. Roll gauze and gauze sponge
4. Adhesive tape
5. Antibiotic ointment
6. Nylon leash
7. Latex gloves



Household Medications

DO NOT give your pet any medications (Advil, Tylenol, aspirin, etc.) without checking with a veterinarian first.

Many human drugs are toxic to animals and could preclude use of important medications to help your pet.



Abdominal Pain

Signs

Whining, listless / restless, lethargic, arching back, unable to get comfortable, vomiting / diarrhea, bloated or distended abdomen.

Action

DO NOT give your pet food or water — this may induce vomiting and make the condition worse. Abdominal pain can be very serious and is often life threatening if not addressed. Limit the activity of your pet, carry them if possible. You can put small pets in a box or carrier. Call a veterinarian immediately and seek professional help as soon as possible.



Allergic Reactions

Signs

Fever, vomiting / diarrhea, hives, scratching, chewing at paws, swollen face or puffiness around eyes, trouble breathing.

Action

Call a veterinarian immediately. Allergic reactions should be treated as soon as possible to prevent shock. An exam by a veterinarian should still be performed on your pet, even if the reaction gets better. If you have spoken to your veterinarian in advance and have received proper dosage information and approval, it may be appropriate to give the animal over-the-counter medications such as an antihistamine, diphenhydramine.

Bite Wounds & Lacerations

Action

As always, approach the animal slowly. Injured animals often communicate their pain through aggressive or defensive actions, especially after a bite injury. MUZZLE the animal or have someone restrain the head. Examine the entire animal for bleeding, lacerations or pain. Multiple bite wounds can be hard to find under thick coats. If you cannot quickly reach a veterinarian, flush each wound with saline (if not available, clean water will do). Wrap large wounds as best as possible, small wounds can be left uncovered. DO NOT use tourniquets to stop bleeding — apply firm pressure if needed. Seek veterinary care IMMEDIATELY — bite wounds often need to be flushed extensively or sutured to help prevent infection. Wounds that are managed within 6 hours of the injury often require less intensive care.

Burns

Action

First aid for chemical, electrical or thermal (heat) burns. Immediately flush the area with cool water for 5 minutes. After flushing, apply a cold compress to the area for 10 to 15 minutes. NEVER apply an ice pack directly to the skin. Wrap the pack in a thin towel or other available material. Call a veterinarian immediately and seek professional help and examination. Burns do need to be addressed immediately and can be life threatening when severe.



Cardiac Emergencies

Signs

Collapse, weakness, bluish or gray gum color, rapid / slow heart rate.

Action

Call and seek veterinary care immediately, as such emergencies are often life threatening.

Limit your pet's activity; carry them if possible.

If your pet stops breathing or loses consciousness, turn to the pet CPR section, page 12.



Diarrhea

Action

A few episodes of diarrhea can be due to stress or change in the animal's diet. Make sure that your pet continues to drink water, but withhold food for 12 to 24 hours.

If the diarrhea persists for more than 24 hours, seek veterinary care immediately. If your pet is showing other signs of illness (vomiting, lethargy, weakness) do not wait 12 to 24 hours; seek veterinary care as soon as possible. Diarrhea can often be a symptom of more serious illness or disease, and can cause dehydration which can also be quite serious.

Ear Emergencies

Signs

Scratching at ears, shaking head, whining, head tilting, swollen / puffy ear flap, strange odor or discharge from ear(s).

Action

MUZZLE your pet or have someone hold the mouth closed while you examine the ears. Look for signs of redness, swelling of the ear flap, discharge or unusual odor. Look for any obvious foreign body (plant material, etc.) and pull it out if possible. If the signs of ear problems persist, call a veterinarian and have your pet seen as soon as possible. If the ear needs flushing, it is advisable to have your veterinarian do this. Regardless, it should only be done with sterile saline solution. Try to prevent your pet from scratching at the ears or shaking the head excessively as this can make the problem worse. Always avoid getting water in your dog's ears. Ask your family veterinarian for an ear 'drying' agent if your pet loves playing in water and / or frequently experiences ear infections.

Eye Emergencies

Signs

Squinting, discharge / tearing, redness, swelling, bleeding, different pupil size.

Action

If there is an obvious laceration or foreign object in or around the eye, seek veterinary care immediately. DO NOT try to bandage the laceration or remove the object. If the source of the irritation is known to be chemical or fine debris / dirt, flush the eye(s) with sterile saline (or clean water) immediately for 5 to 10 minutes and then seek veterinary care. Eye injuries and infections can get worse very quickly; IMMEDIATE diagnosis and treatment is critical in the preservation of your pet's eyesight.



Fractures

Signs

Pain, not using a limb, limb looks bent or swollen.

Action

MUZZLE the animal or have someone restrain the head.

Check the limb for open wounds or bleeding. If excessive bleeding, wrap the area with a towel or other available material while trying not to move the limb. DO NOT pull on the limb in an attempt to align the fracture, such

action can result in further injury and increased bleeding. Stabilize the limb as best as possible (carry your pet if possible) and seek professional help immediately. DO NOT give any pain medications to your pet (some are toxic to animals) unless instructed to do so by a veterinarian. Avoid wrapping the leg, as it is easy to impede blood circulation.



Heat Emergencies & Dehydration

Signs

Panting (excessive), lethargic, inability to stand, uncoordinated movements, vomiting or diarrhea.

Action

Move your pet to a cool area as soon as possible; seek shade or the indoors. Keep pet calm and still. DO NOT try to get pet to stop panting; this is how your pet expels heat. If water is nearby, encourage pet to stand or lay down in cool water. Put small amounts of water on the tongue, or offer your pet ice cubes to eat. If not vomiting, pet should respond rapidly (10 to 15 minutes). If your pet does not seem to respond to the cooling therapy, or if he or she loses consciousness or has great difficulty breathing, or if the skin on the back of their neck does not spring back to normal position immediately when pulled into a tented position, seek veterinary care immediately. Light colored animals can get sunburned just like people. Encourage pet to stay in the shade and ask your veterinarian for a recommendation on sunblocks for your pet.

Hypothermia Emergencies

Signs

Shivering (excessive, relentless), lethargy, weakness, inability to use limbs.

Action

Move your pet away from the wind and cold into a warm place. Wrap your pet in warm, dry blankets or clothing. DO NOT rub your pet with the blankets, this can damage cold tissue and make frostbite worse. Try to raise your pet's body temperature slowly over the course of 20 minutes. Warm water bottles (wrapped in towels to avoid direct contact with skin) can be used under the blankets to help increase your pet's temperature. To take your pet's temperature, use only an approved rectal thermometer. Normal temperature should be 100° to 102.5°. If an area is discolored (bluish or pale), the body part or skin may have been frozen and is exhibiting signs of frostbite. Take the animal out of the cold and transport to the nearest veterinary hospital. DO NOT use electric heat in any form!

Insect Bites & Tick Removal

Action

Like people, animals vary in their reactions to insect venom. The response can range from mild irritation to allergic shock. Check the area for any remaining stingers or insects. Remove them and cleanse the area with soap and water. Cool wet towels or gauze can be used (for 20 to 30 minutes) to soothe the area. Watch your pet for signs of allergic reaction (see Allergic Reactions, page 2, and follow the instructions if needed). Be particularly mindful of difficulties breathing. When returning from a park or a hike, check thoroughly for ticks by running your fingers through your pet's entire coat, and inspect the paws, pads, between toes, and inside floppy ears. Should you find a tick on your pet, please contact your veterinarian to find the most appropriate way for your pet to have the tick removed.

Moving Patients with Injuries

Action

If your pet is unable to walk, carry them to the car. If they are too big to carry, use a towel (under the abdomen, in front of rear legs) to support the hind end or use a heavy blanket as a stretcher to carry them to the car. Professional diagnosis and treatment is recommended as soon as possible.



Neurologic Emergencies

Signs

Inability to use limb(s), unable to stand, circling, seizures, head tilt, abnormal behavior.

Action

Seek veterinary care as soon as possible, neurologic disease is difficult to treat and is often very serious.

Poisonings

Signs

Disorientation, vomiting, seizures, weakness, retching, salivating (excessive).

Action

CALL a veterinarian immediately. If the source of the poisoning is known, have the container with you when you call. You will need information on the packaging to determine the appropriate treatment. If the source is unknown, seek emergency assistance IMMEDIATELY. Anti-toxin treatment should be started as soon as possible to minimize absorption of the poison. If professional medical help is unavailable, veterinary POISON CONTROL can be reached at (888) 426-4435. Please make a note of the case number provided by poison control, your veterinarian will need it for reference. If possible, bring the toxic agent with you to the veterinarian.

Respiratory Emergencies

Signs

Collapse, weakness, bluish or gray gum color, rapid or shallow breathing.

Action

Call and seek veterinary care immediately. Such emergencies should not be taken lightly as they are often life threatening. If your pet allows you to look in their mouth, look for any foreign object that may be obstructing the airway.* ONLY try to remove the object (with tweezers or pliers) if it is COMPLETELY stopping your pet from breathing. If they can still pass some air (wheezing) get them to a veterinary hospital as soon as possible. Limit your pet's activity; carry them if possible. If your pet stops breathing or loses consciousness, turn to the pet CPR section, page 12.

* If trying to look in your pet's mouth distresses them more, stop what you are doing and transport them to a veterinary hospital.

Seizures

Signs

Shaking (uncontrollably), tremors, strange facial movements, unable to stand, paddling (swimming action) with paws, loss of bowel or urinary control.



Action

DO NOT try to restrain your pet during an episode. DO NOT put your hand near your pet's mouth. Move objects away that may cause injury during the seizure and, if possible, place the animal onto a soft surface, such as carpeting. CALL a veterinarian immediately. Try to get your pet to the veterinary hospital as soon as possible.

Urinary Emergencies

Signs

Frequent urination or straining, blood in urine, difficulty or pain when urinating, vomiting.

Action

Animals can develop urinary blockage and infections just like people. Once you have detected the signs of a problem, CALL your veterinarian and take your pet in as soon as possible. The problem has most likely been going on longer than you realized. DO NOT wait and observe the pet to see how he or she does.

Vital Signs

Taking a Heart Rate or Pulse:

The heartbeat of a dog or cat can be felt at about the point where the left elbow touches the chest (about the 5th rib). Place your hand or stethoscope over this area and count the heartbeats.

Pulses can also be felt with a light touch high up on the inner thigh approximately half way between the front and back of the leg.

Normal Heart and Pulse Rates:

- Small breed Dogs (up to 30 pounds.):
100-160 beats per minute.
- Medium to large breed Dogs (over 30 pounds.):
60-100 beats per minute.
- Puppy (until 1 year old):
120-160 beats per minute.
- Cats:
150 - 220 beats per minute.

Normal Breathing Rates:

- Dogs:
10 - 30 breaths per minute, panting is faster.
- Cats:
20 - 30 breaths per minute. (Note: Panting in a cat can be a sign of serious illness and may require immediate veterinary attention).

Normal Temperatures:

- Dogs:
100° - 102.5° F
- Cats:
100° - 102.5° F



Vomiting

Action

Look for signs of foreign material or strange food in the vomit. When you call the veterinarian, let them know of any recent history of your pet eating foreign objects, new foods, or trash. Rest the stomach for 4-6 hours by offering no food and water. Then try small amounts of water and bland food every two hours. If there is no further vomiting, you can return your pet to a normal diet. If the vomiting persists, or if your pet shows other signs of illness, seek veterinary care immediately. If your pet has unproductive vomiting, see your veterinarian immediately.



CardioPulmonary Resuscitation — CPR

CPR is an emergency technique used to help a person or animal whose breathing and / or heart has stopped. The first step is to determine if the animal is breathing and if he has a pulse. IT IS DANGEROUS to perform CPR on an animal if he is breathing normally and has a pulse. CPR should be performed until the animal has a pulse and starts breathing again or until you have reached a veterinary hospital. However, after 20 minutes, the chances of reviving an animal are extremely unlikely.

Artificial Respiration

Determine if the animal is breathing. You can look for chest movement or place a mirror in front of the animal's nose and watch for condensation. If the animal is not breathing, check the mouth and throat for foreign objects. Then, tilt the head back slightly to extend the neck and hold the muzzle sealing the mouth and lips with your hands. Forcefully blow air in the animal's nose. Give four or five rapid breaths and then check to see if the animal begins breathing without assistance.

If not, repeat with a rate of 20-30 breaths per minute for cats and small dogs (less than 30 pounds) and 12-20 breaths per minute in larger dogs (more than 30 pounds).

Chest Compressions

Check for a heartbeat or pulse before starting chest compressions. You can feel for the pulse on the inside of the pelvic limb (thigh), or feel for a heart beat on the left side of the chest. DO NOT assume that there is no heartbeat or pulse simply because an animal is not breathing. If the animal is conscious and responds to you, then the heart is beating.

Small Dog (< 30 lbs.) or Cat:

Lay your pet down with the chest facing you. Kneel and place the palm of one of your hands over the ribs at the point where the elbow touches the chest. Place your other hand underneath from the opposite side of the chest. With your elbows softly locked, compress the chest 1/2 to 1 inch. If working alone, perform 10 chest compressions for each breath (see above) for five rotations

and then check for pulse. If there are two people, have one perform the compressions at a rate of 5 compressions for each breath, then check for pulse. Rate of compressions should be 2 compressions per second.

Medium to Large Dog (30-90 pounds):

Rate of compression should be 3 compressions per 2 seconds (80-100 per minute).

Giant dog (90+ pounds):

Use the technique for medium to large dogs. The rate of compression should be 1 per second, perform 10 compressions for each breath. When doing compressions, keep elbows straight and bend at the waist.





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