

Emergencies and First Aid

**What kinds of emergencies can occur with pets?**

Animals can experience several kinds of medical emergencies, from trauma, like an automobile injury to acute internal problems, like an intestinal blockage. The following emergencies are the most serious and require immediate attention:

* Massive injuries to the body
* Seizures
* Burns and scalds
* Heat stroke
* Bites and fight wounds
* Continuous vomiting and/or diarrhea
* Eclampsia (milk fever)
* Hemorrhagic gastroenteritis (watery, bloody diarrhea)
* Bloat (gastric dilation)
* Any severe difficulty in breathing
* Cardiac failure
* Massive hemorrhage
* Profound shock from any cause
* Anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction)
* Penetrating wounds of the chest or abdomen
* Coma and loss of consciousness
* Poisoning

**What should I do if an emergency occurs?**

* Keep calm.
* Contact the veterinary hospital, appraise them of the situation and get first aid advice.
* Keep your dog or cat warm and as quiet as possible. Also keep movement to a minimum if there is possible trauma.
* Obtain a suitable container for your pet, such as a strong cardboard box for smaller pets, or carefully maneuver larger pets onto a blanket or thick towel so he/she can be placed into the box or directly into the car.
* Get to the veterinary hospital as soon as possible, but remember to drive carefully!

**How can I give my pet first aid?**

* **Automobile injury**: Make sure your pet has a clear airway, but do not put your hand in his/her mouth if he/she is conscious. Cover wounds with the cleanest material available. Handle your pet with care, supporting his/her body as much as possible. Carry him/her in a basket, box or cage to the veterinary hospital.
* **Massive hemorrhage**: Place a pad of cotton or wool over a gauze dressing and apply it to the wound. Bandage it firmly and/or simply apply direct pressure until you can have your pet seen.
* **Seizures**: First, prevent your pet from falling or otherwise injuring him/herself. Do not put your hand in his/her mouth at any time. Try to keep your pet as quiet as possible; keeping him/her in a dimly-lit room will also help his/her recovery.
* **Burns and scalds**:  Soothe the burned area by running cool water over it or covering it with wet towels with mild burns. With more severe burns or chemical burns, contact your veterinarian first. If loss of skin occurs, cover the area with the cleanest material available.
* **Eclampsia (milk fever)**: This condition is usually seen in female dogs three to five weeks after giving birth. It is rarely seen in cats. Symptoms include excessive panting, wild eyes, muscle spasms, weakness and seizures. First, remove your dog from her puppies to prevent further nursing. Call your veterinarian immediately. Eclampsia is easily treated, but can be fatal if it is not addressed right away.
* **Heat stroke (excessive panting and obvious distress)**:This condition most often occurs when a dog is left in a hot car with little or no ventilation, or with excessive playing on a hot day. Place your dog in a tub of cool water or rinse them with cool water. When you are ready to transport him/her to the veterinary hospital, wrap him/her in a cool, wet towel.
* **Hemorrhagic gastroenteritis (watery, bloody diarrhea)**: Seek veterinary attention immediately. There is usually watery diarrhea with dark blood and the pet may or may not be lethargic depending on how early you notice. This is a serious condition.
* **Bites and fight wounds**: Clean superficial wounds with cool water and seek veterinary attention. Deep wounds should not be rinsed in case of punctures into internal structures
* **Poisoning**:  DO NOT INDUCE VOMITING if your pet has ingested corrosive material such as strong acid, alkali or petroleum-based products. If corrosive or toxic material is on the skin, wash it profusely. Bring a sample of the suspected poison with its container to the veterinary hospital. Hydrogen peroxide at home can be used with advice from your veterinarian depending on the toxin.
* **Eye injury**: If the cornea is penetrated or perforated, it will be very painful. Prevent your pet from scratching at his/her eye and creating further damage, most commonly with an e-collar/cone. If the eyeball is out of the socket, keep it moist with saline solution (commonly used for contact lenses) and protect it from direct injury. Seek veterinary help immediately.
* **Shock**: Shock is a complex body reaction to a number of situations. These include acute loss of blood volume such as hemorrhage, heart failure and other causes of decreased circulation (e.g., severe and sudden allergic reaction and heat stroke). If not treated quickly and effectively, shock may cause irreversible injury to body cells and can quickly become fatal. Signs include heavy, often noisy breathing, rapid heart rate with a weak pulse, pale (possibly even white) mucous membranes (e.g., gums, lips and under the eyelids), severe depression or listlessness and cool extremities (e.g., limbs and ears). Your pet may also vomit. Keep your pet warm and quiet and seek immediate veterinary assistance.