

Some Basics of First Aid for Pets

Obviously, the best way to avoid an emergency is to prevent it in the first place. Our pets are curious creatures by nature and some seem to make it their life's ambition to get into trouble. Roaming cats and dogs risk a multitude of traumas, in addition to the risk of not coming home. I cannot emphasize the need for permanent identification enough, but more on this topic (if they let me) in another article. So what happens if you have an emergency situation? A first aid kit which is kept stocked and readily available can be your lifeline. It should contain:

- 2 rolls of 3" gauze
- 12 or so gauze sponges 3" X 3"
- Non-stick (paper) tape
- Telfa® (nonstick) pads
- Small tube of antibiotic ointment (e.g.: Neosporin)
- Water soluble lubricating jelly
- Saline solution 8 oz - same as contact lens care
- Hydrogen peroxide 8 oz or syrup of Ipecac
- Alcohol
- Eyedropper or dosing syringe
- Tweezers
- Scissors
- Nail trimmers
- Rectal thermometer
- Muzzle
- Antihistamine such as Benedryl®
- Paper towels to clean up messes along with 3 large garbage bags to protect car upholstery
- A list of emergency phone numbers that include poison control, your veterinarian, and a veterinary emergency clinic. The ASPCA sponsored Animal Poison Control Center is open 24-7 at 1-888-426-4435. A \$60 dollar fee may be applied to your credit card.

2 liter soda bottles can be used to hold warm water to keep your pet from getting chilled. Keep a pet carrier close by for transporting a small dog or cat; a plywood board or stout blanket carried by the four corners can be used to transport a larger dog.

When an emergency occurs, assess the risk to you, the pet, and others. Pet emergencies are stressful, and anxiety can interfere with your common sense. Hurt or sick pets react unpredictably, often instinctually which can make handling difficult. Pain and fear can make even the nicest animal bite the handler. Never muzzle a pet that has trouble breathing or is nauseated. Approach an injured pet from the side where they can see you, but not straight on which may trigger aggression. If the dog or cat is struggling and anxious, it is important to speak in a calm voice and move slowly. Use a thick blanket or comforter placed over the animal instead of your hands to help avoid human injury and gather up the animal.

Vital signs: Normal temperature is between 101 and 103 °F. Normal heart rate at rest is from 100 to 130 beats per minute but cats can have heart rates over 200 beats per minute when they are stressed. Approximately 20-24 breaths per minute are normal. Gums should be pink and moist. A pulse can be obtained by placing your hand in your pet's groin area to pick up the femoral pulse.

Bleeding Control: locate the source of the bleeding and apply firm pressure with a clean towel or gauze for 15 min. If the blood pools quickly or spurts, you can assume it is serious; immediate attention is required. Try to estimate the amount of blood lost. A wrap may be applied to the area. Do not attempt

to clean the wound because the clot may be dislodged, and bleeding resumed. Open fractures, lacerations, bite wounds, and gunshot wounds may require this type of care.

Wound care: Many minor wounds can be treated at home but they should be checked by a veterinarian who may recommend antibiotics. Apply water soluble lubricant jelly to the wound to protect it and keep hair out. Carefully clip the hair around the wound and gently rinse with saline or water (the lubricating jelly will be rinsed off at this time). If the wound is visibly soiled, carefully flush until all debris is removed. Gently cleanse with antibacterial soap then rinse well with water or saline. Apply antibiotic ointment and wrap the wound if necessary to keep it clean. Puncture wounds especially around the joints or vital areas such as the neck, chest or abdomen cannot be treated adequately at home. Burns, abrasions, lacerations, or minor bite wounds can be treated this way.

Inducing vomiting: Use this technique only with the help of poison control or your veterinarian. Do not induce vomiting in an unconscious animal. Feed (dogs only) approximately 1 teaspoon of hydrogen peroxide (use eye dropper or dose syringe). If no vomiting has occurred in 10 minutes, repeat twice more if needed. Do not induce vomiting if acids, alkalis, or petroleum distillates like gasoline or kerosene have been ingested. Contact a veterinarian as soon as possible.

Insect stings/bites: Unless the animal has difficulty breathing from facial and / or neck swelling, apply ice wrapped in a towel over the swollen, painful area. You may give Benedryl® but call your veterinarian or emergency clinic for dosing. If after 1 hour there is no improvement or worsening, seek veterinary care.

Hyperthermia or Heat Stroke: Excessive panting, weakness, vomiting and elevated body temperature (from 105 to 110 °F) are signs of heat stroke. If your pet's body temp is greater than 106, immerse it in cold water. Stop the cooling process once the temp drops to 104 degrees. Again, follow up with your veterinarian to prevent shock and other complications.

Hit by car: If the animal is having trouble breathing, keep it upright and do not muzzle. Because fractures are very painful, you may want to muzzle the animal when it is being moved, however, try to keep the animal as quiet as possible. Take care to support the entire body when moving an injured animal. Most are more comfortable with the injured side up. Keep them covered and use the 2 liter soda bottles filled with warm water to keep them warm.

Choking: Open the animal's mouth to see if a foreign object is present, taking care not to get bitten. You can use a roll of tape to wedge a dog's mouth open and protect you from the dog's teeth. If the airway is not blocked, wait for veterinary assistance before attempting to remove any object. If the airway is blocked, you can use the eraser end of a pencil to try and dislodge the object. If fluid is causing the choking, hold the animal with its head lower than its chest for approximately 5-10 seconds to drain the fluid. Try wiping the fluid from the mouth with a tissue or small towel.

There are many more situations that may require your intervention, and our pets are masters at creating unique scenarios. I did not cover pet CPR because done improperly, it can cause more harm than good. Preventative care and accident proofing are the best measures you can take to keep your pet out of trouble.