

CANINE FIRST AID

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

Emergencies come in all forms, automobile accidents, hit-by-car injuries, bite wounds, burns, heatstroke, poisoning, seizures, and more.

For a general overview of what constitutes an emergency, refer to our fact sheet on **Canine Emergencies**.



What is first aid?

First aid is initial treatment given in a medical emergency. The purpose is:

- To preserve life
- To reduce pain and discomfort
- To minimize any risk of permanent disability or disfigurement

Priorities

- Keep calm and try not to panic. If possible, get help so that you can aid your dog while someone helps with restraint, transportation, etc.

- Contact your veterinarian as soon as possible.

- If there are suspected internal or limb injuries, keep your pet as still as possible.

Try to keep your pet warm, wrap it in a coat or even a newspaper. Shock often follows most emergencies.

- Take your dog to the veterinary hospital as soon as possible.
- Drive carefully and observe the speed limit.

What is shock?

Shock is a complex condition often following an acute injury or emergency. A life-threatening fall in blood pressure is a dangerous part of shock.

What are the signs of shock?

Clinical signs of systemic shock include rapid breathing and elevated heart rate with pale mucous membranes: gums, lips or under the eyelids. The feet or ears may feel cold and your dog may vomit and shiver. Most pets become quiet and unresponsive.

What should I do?

Keep the pet as quiet as possible and try to conserve heat by covering it with bedding or newspapers. If necessary, apply the **A, B, C** of first aid:



- A** Airway
- B** Breathing
- C** Cardiac function

Airway – Anything that obstructs the airway prevents oxygen entering the lungs. Do your best to clear the mouth and throat of any obstruction such as vomitus, saliva or foreign bodies such as grass, sticks or balls. Be careful; your pet may bite you in panic.

Breathing – If your dog is unconscious and does not appear to be breathing, try gently pumping the chest with the palm of your hand, at the same time feeling just behind the elbow to detect a heart beat or pulse. Close the muzzle with your hand and blow into the nostrils. This is best accomplished by covering the pet's nose with your mouth. Be careful!. Injured pets may bite you out of fear. If you are unsure about the health or vaccination status of the injured pet, avoid contact with bodily fluids and blood.

Cardiac function – If you are unable to detect a heartbeat or pulse or if appears weak and slow, try pressing on the chest with your palm. Five (5) rapid chest compressions followed by one to two (1-2) deep breaths is a simple form of animal cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Specific first aid

Blood loss

Once you have checked A, B, C above and if the bleeding is severe, try to stop it. If bleeding is from a cut pad or paw, apply a dressing using a piece of bandage or clothing. If the bleeding persists and is soaking through the bandage, don't waste any more time, since this is a medical emergency. Most bleeding wounds will require medical or surgical treatment. If the wounds are treated within four (4) hours, they can often be sutured. Deep cuts treated after four hours have increased risk of infection and complication.

Burns and scalds

Cool the burned area with cold water as quickly as possible. Cover the burned area with damp towels. If the injury is due to a caustic substance, rinse with cold water for fifteen (15) minutes and contact your veterinarian for further advice.

Eye injuries

Injuries to the eye are always very painful. If a foreign body (grass awn, stick, etc.) can be seen, it may be possible to remove it by gently rinsing the eye with eye wash or contact lens saline solution. Seek veterinary advice as soon as possible.

Seizures

Seizures can be due to many causes. These range from eclampsia (milk fever) to epilepsy. If due to eclampsia, remove the puppies from the mother immediately. All dogs that are seizing or have had a recent seizure should be kept in a dark, quiet, confined area until medical help can be sought. Contact your veterinarian immediately.

Heat stroke

This most commonly occurs in hot weather when dogs are left in cars without adequate ventilation. Body temperature rises dramatically. Clinical signs are excessive panting and obvious distress quickly followed by coma and death. Reduce the pet's body temperature as quickly as possible using cool water and keep the dog wet during transport to the veterinarian. Keep the car windows open. Evaporation will help reduce body temperature. Avoid using ice or ice water because this may drop the temperature too quickly and cause additional complications.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM.
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