

# Medical Emergency Tips for Your Dog



It's an unfortunate fact that dogs, like people, experience medical emergencies. If your pet falls victim to illness or an accident, he will need to see a veterinarian stat. The following tips may keep your dog out of immediate danger until he receives professional help.

## What to Do in Emergencies

One of the first steps you should take in an emergency is to call your veterinarian. Be prepared to describe the situation. Your veterinarian can tell you how to administer first aid and how to transport your pet safely.

## Breathing

If the dog is unable to breathe, you'll need to perform artificial respiration. First, clear the dog's mouth of any obstructions, including mucus or blood. Then close the mouth, place your lips over the dog's nostrils, and give three-to-four big breaths, 10-to-12 times per minute. If you can't detect a heartbeat, position the dog on his back or side. Support small dogs by placing one hand on each side of the chest near the elbow. Perform five chest compressions to one quick breath. Continue this pattern until the dog starts breathing on his own.

## Bleeding

External bleeding requires immediate attention, so press down firmly on the area with your fingers or the palm of your hand and then apply a firm, but not tight, bandage. Don't worry about cleaning out the wound until the bleeding has stopped. Take the dog to the veterinarian as quickly as possible. Antibiotics may be needed to stave off infection.

Internal bleeding, from a fall or from being hit by a car or other heavy object, can be more dangerous. The dog may show these signs: painful or swollen abdomen; pale gums; blood in vomit, urine, stools, saliva, or nose discharge; trouble breathing; weakness and collapse. A veterinarian needs to treat internal bleeding as soon as possible.

## Shock

Shock sometimes occurs in situations that involve head injuries, significant loss of blood or fluids, and severe infection. The signs include a rapid heart rate, pale mucous membrane, very low blood pressure, very little urinary output, and a weak pulse. Keep the dog warm and quiet, treat any visible injuries, and take him to the veterinarian immediately.

## Broken Bones

Fractures require immediate attention. Dogs will hold a fractured or dislocated limb in an unnatural position; signs of a fracture often include lameness, pain, and swelling. The dog should be transported to the veterinarian with as little movement as possible. Do not use antiseptics or ointments on open fractures.

## Heatstroke

Heatstroke may occur when dogs are left in cars or overexercised on hot, or even warm days, or when kennel areas don't have proper ventilation. Signs include panting and drooling, skin that is hot to the touch, vomiting, loss of coordination, and collapse. You should use cool water, ice packs, or wet towels to cool the dog, but do NOT immerse him in cold water. Offer him small amounts of drinking water once he begins to cool down. Call your veterinarian after administering the first aid, or better yet, have someone else call while you're treating your dog.

## Vomiting and Diarrhea

Vomiting and diarrhea are usually signs of problems with the digestive system and could be caused by any number of things, from ingestion of spicy foods or poisons to gastrointestinal system disease, kidney or liver failure, or nervous system disorders. Dehydration from vomiting or diarrhea can be fatal. Make sure the dog has plenty of water. If your dog is vomiting with diarrhea or vomiting and has a poor appetite, call your veterinarian and be prepared to tell her about anything that could have contributed, such as access to human medications, toxins, a change in diet, and other possible causes.

## Seizures

Whole-body seizures, called Grand Mal seizures, cause your dog's entire body to convulse, while some seizures may be localized, such as a facial tremor, or sudden onset of rhythmic movements or actions. Stay calm and note how long the seizure lasts. To prevent your dog from hurting himself, keep him away from stairs, cushion his head, and gently hold and comfort him until he begins to regain consciousness. Call your veterinarian.

## Stings

Bee and wasp stings can be painful and frightening for a dog. A single bee sting will produce pain, swelling, redness, inflammation. If your dog is stung, carefully remove the stinger with tweezers. Apply a paste of baking soda and water and then an ice pack to relieve swelling and pain. Ask your vet about giving your dog a dose of oral antihistamine. Give him fresh water and watch him carefully. Allergic reactions usually occur within 20 minutes, but can be delayed for hours.

If the sting is on the nose, mouth or around the head, observe your dog for several hours to make sure that any swelling does not interfere with breathing or swallowing. If the swelling increases dramatically after a few minutes after the sting, see a veterinarian immediately. If your dog disturbs a hive, call him to you and put distance between your dog and the swarm immediately. Then take him to the closest veterinarian. Treatment for massive amounts of stings must occur quickly to prevent shock and circulatory collapse and to minimize damage to organ systems.

## Choking

A dog that coughs forcefully, drools, gags, holds his mouth open or paws at his mouth may be choking. Don't stick your fingers in his mouth because you might be bitten or push the object further in. Try to dislodge the object by thumping the dog between the shoulder blades or by applying several quick, squeezing compressions on both sides of his rib cage.

# Dog First Aid Kit

Keeping certain items on hand in case of emergency is essential. Remember, a first aid kit is not a substitute for veterinary care. Here is a list of things to include:

- Bandaging materials: Think sterile pads, stretch bandages, and bandaging tape
- Hydrogen peroxide
- Cold pack
- Antibiotic ointment
- Hydrocortisone 1%
- Magnifying glass
- Small scissors
- Tweezers (for bee stingers and splinters)
- Disposable gloves
- Cotton balls
- Iodine swabs
- Extra leash
- Emergency numbers for your veterinarian and poison control
- Collapsible water bowl
- Aluminized thermal blanket
- Tourniquet
- Benadryl

Ask your veterinarian to explain the proper use of these items, and in the case of any topical or oral medications, be sure to check with your vet before administering them.