



## **FIRST AID FOR YOUR DOG**

### ***INTRODUCTION***

In a situation requiring first aid, you should always try to distinguish between an emergency and non-emergency situation. Try to keep calm so you can assess whether you need a vet right away, or whether your first aid treatment will be adequate for the time being and you can wait to see a vet, if at all. If you can, practice as many of the following first aid procedures as possible so you are familiar with them should you ever need to use them in a real situation.

### **Emergency Procedure**

- Remember to always approach an injured dog with caution. If the dog makes any attempt to bite, use a muzzle before beginning any treatment.
- Upon approaching an injured dog, if there are no signs of aggression, then stroke the dog, talking calmly and softly.
- If the dog appears to be shivering or shaking, place a blanket or coat over the dog's body. If the dog appears to be excessively hot, cool the dog down by using a fan or an ice pack.
- Your main concern should be preventing the injury from becoming worse while at the same time preparing the dog for transport to a veterinarian.
- As much as possible, start first aid treatment while on your way to the vet and continue the treatment while you are travelling there.
- If there is no possible way you can get to a vet quickly and safely, get someone to phone for the vet while you carry on with the first aid treatment.

### ***EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS***

Preparing for a medical emergency involving your dog is always best accomplished before the event takes place. It is helpful for you to know how to take a dog's pulse rate and body temperature and to understand what is normal for your dog. The ideal time to identify and record this information is when your dog is calm. Being able to provide this information to your veterinarian in a first aid situation can be vital to the well-being of your dog:

The normal pulse rate of a dog varies according to the breed, age, weight and ranges between 80 -120 beats per minute (contact your vet for information on pulse rates for very small breeds). The pulse is a reflection of the heartbeat and is an indicator of blood circulation. To obtain the correct reading, the dog must be calm. Place your finger on the inside of the thigh near the groin and feel gently in that area for a pulse from an artery just under the skin. You can also feel for a heartbeat behind the left elbow between the third and sixth rib. The beat can be observed as a regular, slight movement of the chest wall on the left side of a dog's body where the heart is located. Use a watch with a second hand and count how many beats you feel over the course of one minute. If this heartbeat is within the 80

-120 beats per minute range, than the circulation system is normal. If it is outside this average range, consult with your vet.

The normal temperature range for a dog is between 37.8 °C (or 100 °F) and 39.2 °C (or 102.5 °F). If your dog's temperature is outside this range, consult with your veterinarian, as this could be an indicator of an infection or other illness. To check for temperature, use an ordinary household thermometer. Shake the mercury down below 37.8 °C or 100 °F. Smear the thermometer with a non-irritating lubricant such as petroleum jelly. Secure the dog and insert the thermometer about 2 inches (5 cm) into the dog's anus, holding the bulb against the rectal wall. Check the reading after 1-2 minutes. Wipe the thermometer clean and disinfect; then wash your hands thoroughly.

### ***BLEEDING***

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If bleeding does not stop within 5 minutes, you must try to staunch the flow using the following procedure:

1. With a clean cloth, or even your hand, apply direct pressure to the wound. If blood seeps through, apply more bandages or a cotton wool pad on top of the first bandage; don't try to remove the old bandage.
2. If such pressure won't stop the bleeding, find the nearest pressure point and compress the artery against its underlying bone. Use the flat part of your fingers, not your thumb or finger tips.
3. As a last resort you can try a tourniquet, although this carries the greater risk of stopping circulation to the affected part and causing gangrene. Use it only to save life when nothing else is working and release intermittently.

### ***BREATHING DIFFICULTIES***

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Many things may cause a dog to have difficulty in breathing:

- obstruction of the air passage to the lungs by a foreign body or the dog's own tongue if it is unconscious
- strangulation by its collar
- electrocution
- drowning
- heart attack
- chest injuries

If the dog is breathing with difficulty, clear airway, and if necessary, start artificial respiration. If you cannot see breathing movement, place your ear on the dog's chest and listen for a heartbeat or take its pulse. If the heart has stopped within the last minute or so, but you believe the dog is still alive, apply heart massage and artificial respiration together. Never attempt the kiss of life if you have reason to believe that poison is involved.

#### Artificial respiration

1. Open dog's mouth, grasp tongue and pull it well forward clear of back of throat. Wipe away any mucus or blood. Remove any obstruction.
2. Remove any collar or restricting item.

3. If the animal has fluid in its throat or is a victim of drowning, hold it upside down by its rear legs for 15-30 seconds.
4. If dog is still not breathing, start artificial respiration. Close mouth, place your mouth over the dog's nose and exhale to force air through its nose to the lungs. Watch the dog's chest for the lungs to inflate. Remove your mouth, and repeat the cycle about six times a minute.
5. You may need to carry on for 30-60 minutes, until the dog is breathing by itself or is pronounced dead.

#### Heart Massage/Compression

1. If you cannot hear the dog's heartbeat, strike its chest sharply with your fist once or twice in the region just below the dog's left shoulder.
2. If heart is still not going, apply heart massage. Place the dog on its right side on a firm surface. Put the fingers of one hand on each side of the chest over heart area and compress it firmly but not too hard. Then release the pressure.
3. Repeat 70 times a minute.

#### BURNS

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Animals are afraid of fire so burns from a naked flame are not too common. However, a dog dozing by the fire may get singed or burnt. A dog can also burn its feet by walking on a hot surface and scalds are quite common. Puppies, especially, might chew on an electric cord which can cause a special type of burn, often accompanied by electric shock.

#### Heat Burns

1. Do not apply butter, grease or any ointment.
2. Soak cloth in cold water and place over burn.
3. Send for the vet if the burn seems serious. A superficial burn is painful, reddens the skin and singes the hair, but the hair will not pull out easily. A serious burn is actually less painful because the nerves have been destroyed. The skin may be white, black or brown, and the hair will either be gone completely or will pull out easily.
4. Keep the burn covered with a wet dressing that is covered with thick dry towels. Make the dog stay in a lying down position, restrained in warm blankets.
5. Give fluid as for dehydration, unless the dog is vomiting.
6. Treat for shock.

#### Chemical Burns

1. Restrain the dog before treatment.
2. Wash burned area with lots of plain water, especially if around the face.
3. If acid, rinse with solution of soda bicarbonate and water. If alkali, use plain water only.

4. Apply soothing ointment (ie. polysporin, aloe vera, olive oil).

### ***COLLAPSING***

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In this situation apply common sense first aid while getting to the vet as quickly as possible.

1. Check pulse, pupils, breathing and temperature. Apply artificial respiration and/or heart massage as outlined previously.
2. Always handle your dog as if it may have a broken bone or other serious internal injury.
3. Treat for shock.

### ***CONVULSIONS/FITS***

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There are basically two kinds of convulsion:

- the single convulsion which lasts for a minute or two and doesn't recur for at least 24 hours
- repeated or continuous convulsions which are serious emergencies and need veterinary attention immediately

If a dog is having repeated convulsions, gently restrain the dog so it can't injure itself by placing a towel over it. Don't put your hand on the dog or in or near its mouth as you may get bitten and will require treatment yourself. Once you have restrained the dog, get to the vet immediately. A single convulsion may also require veterinary attention but usually are not so serious. Again, restrain the dog and get to the vet as soon as possible.

### ***INJURIES TO THE EYEBALL***

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Laceration of the eyeball itself or penetration by a foreign object is very serious. Place a damp cloth over the place and get to the vet at once. Don't try to wash the eye or remove a foreign body as you are likely to do more harm than good. If there is bleeding in the area of the eyes, apply direct pressure with dry gauze pads and get to a vet. A simple bruise can usually be dealt with by a cold compress.

### ***SHOCK***

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'Shock' is a term used loosely and most often incorrectly. In both human and animal terms, it is much more serious than the slight feeling of malaise that might occur after a minor accident or fright. The signs of true shock in dogs are: weakness, collapse, coma, unconsciousness, pale colour of mouth, lips and eyelids, coolness of skin and legs, rapid but weak pulse (may be over 140 per minute), rapid respiration (over 40 a minute), staring eyes and dilated pupils. If any or all of these signs occur after an accident or prolonged illness, treat for shock as below and get to the vet immediately.

1. Keep airways open, giving artificial respiration or heart massage as necessary; bandage or splint any fracture or extensive wound.
2. Wrap the dog in a thick cloth or towel to conserve body heat. If the dog is unconscious, keep its head as low as, or lower than, the rest of the body. Gently massage legs and muscles to maintain circulation unless you suspect that they may be fractured or broken. If the dog is conscious and restless, keep it horizontal and well wrapped up.
3. Get to the vet immediately. Time is vital, especially for the introduction of intravenous fluids in severe cases.

If you absolutely cannot get immediate veterinary help - either at all or for a few hours - give fluids orally. If the dog is conscious, administer an amount (depending on dog's size) of tepid water mixed with glucose every 30 minutes for 4 or 5 doses. Do not give anything by mouth if

the dog is unconscious, convulsing or vomiting. Take pulse and breathing rate every 30 minutes and record them. Note any blood in urine and report these details to the vet.

### ***HEATSTROKE (HEAT EXHAUSTION)***

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Heatstroke can occur when a dog has been confined in a house or car without shade, ventilation or water. It can also happen as a result of a dog becoming overexcited or being under stress. Signs are panting, slobbering, vomiting and diarrhea, raised body temperature, and ultimately, collapse and coma.

1. Remove dog from hot spot into cool or shady area.
2. Soak the dog with cold water from a hose or immerse the dog in an ice bath and gently massage its legs and body until the animal's temperature returns to normal.
3. Gently dry dog with towel. If the dog is conscious, give it small amounts of water. Give artificial respiration if necessary.

### ***POISONING***

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Poisoning is a condition that results from the ingestion, inhalation, absorption, injection, or application of a substance that causes structural damage or functional disturbance of the tissues of the body.

#### What to do:

1. Try to get in touch with a veterinarian or a poison control center, and follow their instructions.
2. If unable to get in touch with a vet or poison control centre, and the poisoning has occurred within the last 3 hours, induce vomiting. Induce vomiting with 5 mL (1 teaspoon) of hydrogen peroxide orally or a teaspoon of salt placed in the mouth. Keep a sample of the vomit for testing.
3. **DO NOT INDUCE VOMITING** if your dog has ingested corrosive material such as strong acid, alkali, or petroleum-based product. *You must get your dog to a veterinarian as soon as possible.*
4. If corrosive or toxic material is on the skin, wash it profusely. Bring a sample of the suspected poison with its container to the vet.

#### What **NOT** to do:

1. Do not give any liquid (other than the hydrogen peroxide or syrup of ipecac if inducing vomiting): other liquids may move the poison into the body sooner.
2. Do not attempt to induce vomiting in seizing, confused, or comatose pets.

#### Common Household Hazards:

- Be aware of the plants you have in your house and in your pet's yard. The ingestion of azalea, oleander, sago palm, easter lily, or yew plant material, by an animal, could be fatal.

- When cleaning your house, never allow your pet access to the area where cleaning agents are used or stored. Cleaning agents have a variety of properties. Some may only cause a mild stomach upset, while others could cause severe burns of the tongue, mouth, and stomach.
- When using rat or mouse baits, ant or roach traps, or snail and slug baits, place the products in areas that are inaccessible to your animals. Most baits contain sweet smelling inert ingredients, such as jelly, peanut butter, and sugars, which can be very attracting to your pet.
- Keep all prescription and over the counter drugs out of reach of your pets, preferably in closed cabinets. Pain killers, cold medicines, anti-cancer drugs, antidepressants, vitamins, and diet pills are common examples of human medication that could be potentially lethal even in small dosages. One regular strength ibuprofen (200mg) could cause stomach ulcers in a 10 lb dog.
- Never leave chocolates unattended. Approximately one half ounce or less of baking chocolate per pound body weight can cause problems. Even small amounts can cause pancreatic problems.
- Many common household items have been shown to be lethal in certain species. Miscellaneous items that are highly toxic even in low quantities include:
  - pennies (high concentration of zinc)
  - mothballs (contain naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene- one or two balls can be life threatening in most species)
  - potpourri oil
  - fabric softener sheets
  - automatic dish detergents (contain cationic detergents which could cause corrosive lesions)
  - batteries (contain acids or alkali which can also cause corrosive lesions)
  - homemade play dough (contains high quantity of salt)
  - winter heat source agents, like hand or foot warmers (contain high levels of iron)
  - cigarettes, coffee grounds, and alcoholic drinks.
- All automotive products such as oil, gasoline, and antifreeze, should be stored in areas away from pet access. As little as one tablespoon could be lethal to a 20 lb dog.
- Before buying or using flea products on your pet or in your household, contact your veterinarian to discuss what types of flea products are recommended. Read ALL information before using a product on your animals or in your home. Always follow label instructions. If you are uncertain about the usage of any product, contact the manufacturer or your veterinarian to clarify the directions BEFORE use of the product.
- When treating your lawn or garden with fertilizers, herbicides, or insecticides, always keep your animals away from the area until the area dries completely. Discuss usage of products with the manufacturer of the products to be used. Always store such products in an area that will ensure no possible pet exposure.