



General Pet First Aid Guide

Knowing basic pet first aid can help stabilize a dog or cat during an emergency until professional veterinary care is available. This guide is designed to help pet owners recognize emergencies, provide basic first aid, and know when immediate veterinary care is necessary.

Stay Calm & Stay Safe

Injured or frightened animals may bite or scratch, even if they normally never would. Move slowly, speak calmly, and avoid sudden movements. Towels, blankets, or muzzles may help protect everyone safely when appropriate.

Bleeding

Apply steady direct pressure using clean gauze, towels, or cloth. Do not repeatedly lift the bandage to check bleeding, as this can disrupt clotting. Heavy bleeding, spurting blood, or bleeding that will not stop within several minutes is an emergency.

Shock

Shock can occur after trauma, blood loss, heatstroke, or severe illness. Signs include pale gums, weakness, rapid breathing, cold feet or ears, collapse, or confusion. Keep pets warm, quiet, and transport immediately for veterinary care.

Broken Bones

Broken bones may cause swelling, severe pain, limping, or abnormal limb position. Limit movement immediately and support the body carefully during transport. Do not attempt to force limbs back into place.

Heatstroke

Heatstroke is life-threatening and can worsen rapidly. Move pets to shade or air conditioning immediately. Use cool—not ice cold—water on the belly, paws, and body. Heavy panting, vomiting, collapse, red gums, or weakness are emergencies.

Hypothermia

Cold exposure can lead to dangerously low body temperature. Warm pets gradually using dry blankets and towels. Avoid direct intense heat, which may worsen injury.

Choking

Signs may include pawing at the mouth, panic, gagging, coughing, or trouble breathing. Use extreme caution when checking the mouth to avoid accidental bites. If breathing is severely affected, seek emergency care immediately.

Seizures

During seizures, pets may paddle, shake, drool, urinate, or become unconscious. Keep them away from stairs or sharp objects and do not place hands near the mouth. Time the seizure and contact a veterinarian.

Poisoning

Many foods, medications, plants, chemicals, and drugs are toxic to pets. Do not induce vomiting unless specifically instructed by poison control or a veterinarian. Bring packaging or photos of toxins whenever possible.

Eye Injuries

ALL eye injuries should be treated as emergencies. Squinting, redness, swelling, discharge, cloudiness, or pawing at the eye may indicate serious injury or infection.

Wounds & Cuts

Flush small wounds gently using saline or clean water. Bite wounds, punctures, deep cuts, or wounds with swelling often require veterinary treatment and antibiotics.

Burns

Burns may result from heat, chemicals, electricity, or hot surfaces. Cool affected areas with room-temperature water and seek veterinary care for anything beyond mild redness.

Allergic Reactions

Bee stings, medications, foods, or insect bites may trigger allergic reactions. Facial swelling, hives, vomiting, collapse, or breathing problems are emergencies.

CPR Awareness

If a pet is unconscious and not breathing, begin CPR only if trained or instructed while seeking emergency help immediately. Chest compressions and rescue breathing techniques vary by size and species.

Recommended Pet First Aid Kit

Keep a basic pet first aid kit available both at home and while traveling. Recommended supplies include gauze, vet wrap, saline rinse, tweezers, styptic powder, thermometer, muzzle, leash, emergency blanket, gloves, flashlight, towels, and emergency veterinary contact information.

Emergency Warning Signs

Difficulty breathing or choking
Collapse or unresponsiveness
Heavy bleeding
Repeated seizures
Blue or pale gums
Severe vomiting or diarrhea
ACTION: Seek emergency veterinary care immediately

First aid is not a replacement for veterinary care, but quick action and preparation can make a major difference during emergencies.