

Common Illnesses & Injuries in Dogs and Cats

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Please note: It is ALWAYS safer to have the pet be seen by a veterinarian if the owner is concerned at all.

Vomiting/Diarrhea: If your pet is vomiting, do not allow it to eat or drink anything for 8-12 hours.

Many pets will “tank up” on water and end up vomiting more. If the vomiting or diarrhea is frequent, seek medical attention. After 10-12 hours you can offer your pet a small amount of water (1/4 cup). If your pet is able to hold that down you can offer 2tbsp of a bland diet (boiled chicken, white rice, low fat yogurt, low fat cottage cheese). After an hour you can offer another 2tbsp and a little more water. If at any point your pet continues to vomit (even before you offer food), seek medical attention. You should feed a bland diet for about 2 days (or until there are normal stools) and then **SLOWLY** mix back in the regular food over 2 days. Small dogs, kittens or puppies can become dehydrated quickly. Diabetics or geriatrics with other conditions are also a concern. *Any blood in the diarrhea or vomit is an EMERGENCY.*

Hit By A Car: ALWAYS an EMERGENCY. Even if your pet looks “fine”, there can be trauma to the chest or abdomen that you cannot see. Because of your pet’s adrenaline rush you may not see signs for several hours and, by then, it’s an emergency. Take your pet **IMMEDIATELY** to a veterinarian.

Steps if Your Pet is HBC:

- 1) Do not get bitten by your own pet
- 2) Use safety measures if getting your pet out of the road
- 3) Have someone sit with the pet if possible to minimize motion, but do not add stress to the pet (don’t bear hug pet if they won’t tolerate it)
- 4) Use large blankets as gurney if needed
- 5) Call veterinary clinic and let them know you are on your way
- 6) Drive safely to veterinary clinic

Bite Wounds: ALWAYS an EMERGENCY. No matter how little the wound looks, until the hair is clipped away and a veterinarian is able to look at it, you cannot really tell. Bite wounds become infected very quickly, particularly when made by a cat. If nothing else they are painful and the pet should be prescribed pain medications and antibiotics. Be sure to place a bandage over any bite wounds that are excessively bleeding and bring your pet in immediately. Bite wounds of particular concern are those over the chest, neck, under-belly and near any joint. Because of state laws, please bring your pet’s rabies certificate (not just the tag) with you to the clinic.

Broken Bones: ALWAYS an EMERGENCY. When a pet breaks a leg it’s not fair to keep the pet home and have it suffer until your regular veterinarian is available. If your pet is limping on the leg, it is likely not broken. Most pets with broken legs will not use the limb. However, while limping is not an emergency it can be very painful. Making your pet wait 12-24 hours for medical treatment may not be fair. If the pelvis is broken they will wobble/stagger when they try to walk, if they try to walk at all. It’s always safer to bring the pet in if they are limping or holding up a leg. Do not give any human pain medications (Tylenol, aspirin) to your pet.

Poisons/Toxins: CALL ASPCA POISON CONTROL IMMEDIATELY: 888-426-4435 or another animal poison control center. There is a \$65 fee. Most veterinarians will end up having to call the poison

center and charge you the fee anyways, so call ahead of time. The ASPCA will be able to tell you if what your pet ingested is toxic, how to make your pet vomit and whether you need to see a veterinarian or not.

Bloat/Gastric Dilatation Volvulus: Occurs in large/deep chested dog. The stomach twists and starts to “bloat”. Signs include: trying to vomit, gagging up white foam, restless, won’t lie down, panting, pacing, groaning in pain, distended abdomen. This is an EMERGENCY and you need to bring in your dog ASAP!

Urethral Obstruction: Occurs mainly in male cats where the urethra becomes obstructed with crystals or other debris. The male cat is unable to urinate. Urethral obstructions can occur in other animals as well, so it’s important to always watch your pets when they eliminate. Signs include: Vomiting, frequent squatting in an attempt to urinate, crying in pain (yowling in cats), tense/painful abdomen, refusal to eat. Owners often mistake urinary obstruction as constipation. This is an EMERGENCY and you need to bring in your pet ASAP!

Thrombus Cat (clot cat): Occurs mostly in cats, usually those with a history of heart disease or heart murmurs. A blood clot becomes formed and lodges in various parts of the body (typically cutting off blood supply to the lower limbs). Signs include: inability to walk, crying/screaming in pain, “floppy” legs, cold feet, breathing difficulties. This is an EMERGENCY.

Near Drowning: Occurs in both dogs and cat usually around pools. If you witness an animal that ends up submerged, even for a short time, it is important you take the pet to a veterinarian IMMEDIATELY. Signs may not be seen for several hours and the concern is that the animal could have swallowed water into their lungs. Signs include: coughing, nasal discharge, vomiting, breathing difficulties.

Heat Stroke/Hypothermia: Heat stroke mainly occurs in dogs, but can be seen cats also. Hypothermia can occur in both animals. Both are an EMERGENCY. Attempt to cool down (spray the animal down with cool water), or warm up (blankets/towels) until you’re able to get to an emergency clinic. Do not use ice or very cold water. Bringing down the pet’s temperature too quickly can cause worse effects than being overheated.

Seizures: Seizures can be a scary thing to see for the first time. If it is your pet’s first seizure you should always bring them into a veterinary clinic immediately. It is imperative you protect yourself. Some pets may become highly aggressive during or after the seizure. They may not know who you are. Be sure to toss a blanket over your pet’s head before picking them up to transport them. This will help protect you from being bitten. Most seizures last a short time...under one minute. If your pet is actively seizing for more than 2 minutes there becomes concern that your pet may suffer brain damage by overheating itself. Be sure your pet is in a safe location when it seizes. Move it off of furniture or away from stairs. Do not worry about it swallowing its tongue as this does not occur in pets. Seizures can happen for a variety of reasons. Most commonly it is from either idiopathic epilepsy, toxins or a neurological issues (brain tumor). Cats rarely have seizures. Middle age dogs, between 2-6 years of age, are prone to epilepsy particularly certain breeds like beagle and labs.

Ocular Injuries: Eyes are important. While it may just be a minor eye infection unless you have the ability to diagnose such an infection it is always better to be safe than sorry and get your pet in to see a veterinarian right away. Pets do not understand that scratching at their eye can cause worse problems, like a scratch to the cornea. Even a mild eye infection may cause the pet discomfort which may result in self mutilation. Eye problems can quickly spiral out of control, so any problem with the eyes should be addressed immediately.

Vestibular Disease (old dog vestibular/rolling dog): The vestibular system lies within the inner ear. Anything from a tumor, ear infection or an idiopathic syndrome (meaning no known cause) can cause it to become unbalanced. Usually older dogs are affected. Signs are usually described as a head tilt, staggering to walk or a complete collapse. When the owners look at the eyes they generally notice the eyes bouncing quickly from side to side. This is called nystagmus. Owners often describe that it looks like their dog suffered a stroke. While not all the causes are emergencies per se, it is very difficult for the average owner to determine if it is truly a vestibular issue versus a more serious neurological issue. It is always best to have your pet seen right away.

Ear Infections: Rarely are ear infections an emergency, but they certainly are uncomfortable. In 'worse case scenarios' the ear drum can rupture leaving the pet deaf. This is why it is important to look inside your pet's ear once a week to ensure that no discharge or foul odor is present. Some owners describe their dog as keeping them up in the middle of the night shaking his head. While it is perhaps not an emergency, it is obviously uncomfortable and should be addressed that evening (ideally), but no later than the morning. Sometimes pets can shake their heads so violently that they break the blood vessels that live in the flap of the ear. The ear flap itself will fill up with blood and become swollen and painful. To avoid this from occurring to the pet it is always best to have even the most minor ear infection dealt with immediately.

Anal Sac Infections: Both dogs and cats have anal sacs. The anal sacs are two tiny sacs that live just inside the rectum at 4:00 and 8:00. When the pet defecates the anal sacs are expressed. Sometimes, for unknown reasons, they are not always expressed during defecation. Pets will try to scoot across the carpet in an effort to release them. If they remain unexpressed the anal sacs can become impacted and infected. This causes great discomfort to the pet. Generally they may cry at their rectum, cry when trying to defecate and sit down a lot. If left to go on for too long the anal sacs will form infectious material and eventually rupture causing severe pain and infection to the pet. If you notice any redness or swelling around the rectum it is always best to have it looked at immediately before it gets to be a massive infection and/or ruptured anal sac. If your pet is scooting excessively but no redness or swelling is noted you can get them seen generally within 24 hours for a manual expression (a groomer or veterinarian can do this for you). If you are not sure it is best to have your pet seen right away.

Dental Disease/Mouth Tumors: Dogs and cats of any age can have dental disease, broken teeth or tumors (both cancerous and benign) of the mouth. While most of these are not emergencies they can be uncomfortable. It is important to check your pet's mouth ideally once a month and look at the teeth and the gums. If you notice a lot of tartar, a protruding mass or broken teeth it's best to get them in to see a veterinarian sooner than later. Certainly any excessive drooling or not wanting to eat should be addressed sooner.

Allergic Reactions: Any pet can suffer an allergic reaction to a variety of chemicals, insects, dust, etc. Most animals will start off by appearing very itchy. The pet's face may start to swell and hives may be noted on the body and legs of the pet. The pet may pant, rub their face on the ground, appear agitated, not settle down or vomit. Facial swelling can get so bad the pet may not be able to see. While some veterinarians will just have the owner try giving diphenhydramine, that is not always the safest thing to do. There are a handful of pets who will become agitated on diphenhydramine. While most allergic reactions can be handled with diphenhydramine, there is a small percent that will develop life threatening anaphylaxis reactions. Signs of anaphylaxis reactions include changes in heart rate, respiratory rate, breathing problems, shock, seizure, coma, death. This is why it is recommended that all allergic reactions be seen by a veterinarian immediately. While not all

allergic reactions are life threatening, they certainly are uncomfortable. A veterinarian is able to provide faster treatment with other types of medications than just home treatment alone.

Failure of the Organs: There are a myriad of diseases that can cause the organs to fail within the body. Most commonly we see organ failure in older pets and most commonly we see heart failure (dogs and cats), kidney failure (more common in cats) and liver failure (dogs and cats). As your pet gets older it is important to really ensure that they are eating the same amount, not drinking too much, not urinating too much and that their bowel movements are normal. Any change in your pet's behavior may indicate a problem. When we think about organ failure the most common signs are as follows:

HEART FAILURE: Increase respiratory effort, coughing, lethargy, not wanting to eat

KIDNEY FAILURE: Increase in drinking water and urinating more, not wanting to eat, vomiting, lethargy

LIVER FAILURE: Not wanting to eating, jaundice, vomiting, lethargy

While not all of these are emergencies they should be addressed in a timely manner particularly if your pet is older. Certainly any acute onsets of collapse, massive vomiting or breathing issues are considered emergencies.

Cancer: Cancer is the number one killer of dogs, but also affects cats in high numbers as well. Most cancers are not emergencies. They are usually slow growing tumors that cause the pet to slow down until some subtle signs are noticed (lethargy, not wanting to eat as much, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing). As your pet gets older it is important to address any changes in behavior or any signs of illness in a timely fashion. Older pets can get benign tumors that grow on the skin (more common in dogs than in cats). It is important that these tumors are looked at by a veterinarian to ensure they are not cancerous. While it is a shock to find out your pet has cancer there are many options for treatment of cancer in pets today. There are some types of cancer that can cause life-threatening emergencies (hemangiosarcoma most commonly). A cancer emergency would usually present in the form of acute collapse, bleeding from the nose/mouth or respiratory problems.