

Is Your Pet in Peril? Know the Signs

Every pet owner's guide to identifying and acting on emergency signs in dogs and cats. Learn the life-saving measures that could prevent tragedy.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Knowing when to seek urgent veterinary treatment can be the difference between life and death for pets
- Identify emergency veterinary clinics in your area ahead of time so you can swiftly access professional assistance when every moment counts
- Pets are masters at hiding illness and often mask their symptoms; some animals, especially cats, may also hide when they don't feel well
- When you arrive at the veterinary clinic, give your provider as many details as you can about your pet's symptoms and the circumstances leading up to them
- Numerous pet health issues can be avoided or controlled via a healthy lifestyle and proactive integrative veterinary care

When your dog or cat gets sick, knowing when to seek urgent veterinary treatment can be the difference between life and death. Since no one expects an emergency to happen, getting up to speed on the signs of a true pet emergency ahead of time is crucial.

In addition, by identifying emergency veterinary clinics in your area ahead of time, you can swiftly access professional assistance when every moment counts. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with the facility's location, operating hours and contact information, so you can eliminate unnecessary stress during times of crisis. Preparedness is key in safeguarding the well-being of your beloved pets.

20 Pet Symptoms That Need Emergency Care

Pets are masters at hiding illness and often mask their symptoms. Some animals, especially cats, may also hide when they don't feel well. Anytime you suspect your pet may be feeling off, a trip to the veterinarian is warranted. However, the signs and symptoms below, compiled by PetMD, signal that your pet needs to get to an emergency veterinary clinic ASAP:¹

- Trauma, such as being hit by a car or attacked by another animal
- Consumption of a toxic food or other substance
- Increase in breathing rate or effort
- Any vomiting or diarrhea in a puppy

- Vomiting repeatedly in an adult dog
- Multiple episodes of diarrhea in an adult dog
- Repeated retching, even if there's no vomit
- Blood in the urine
- Straining to urinate
- Red, painful or swollen eyes
- Swollen or distended abdomen
- Bites from snakes, or stings from wasps or bees
- Not eating for more than 24 hours
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Pale gums
- Weakness
- Pain, such that your pet is unable to move or rest comfortably
- Seizures
- Collapse or loss of consciousness
- A sudden onset of coughing in cats

I also recommend getting informed about basic emergency care that could save your pet's life. If you have a dog, in particular, I suggest you become familiar with **how to perform the Heimlich maneuver** if your dog chokes. Another tool you can learn now to potentially save your pet's life in an emergency is CPR, as well as how to stop bleeding or apply a basic pressure wrap.

Keep these phone numbers handy as well: ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at 888-426-4435, or the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661. In addition, if your pet has a history of health problems, your functional medicine veterinarian can also supply you with necessary medications so you're prepared in an emergency. One example would be an anaphylaxis kit that you keep at home if your pet has a history of allergic reactions.

Taking Action — How to Handle a Pet Emergency

If your pet is having a health emergency, stay calm. You'll be unable to help your pet if you're not focused and thinking clearly. If it's after hours, contact your local emergency facility and let them know you're on your way. Keep your cat in a carrier for safety.

When you arrive at the veterinary clinic, give your provider as many details as you can about your pet's symptoms and the circumstances leading up to them. If a toxic substance is involved, explain what it is that your pet may have eaten, how long ago and the approximate quantity.

In some cases, it can be helpful to **induce vomiting**, but in others — including if your pet has swallowed bleach, drain cleaner or petroleum distillate — it can cause more harm than good. Emergency care is typically more expensive than regular veterinary care, and it's a good idea to plan for these unexpected costs in advance.

According to Forbes, the average treatment costs for ingestion of foreign objects is \$3,500, while a broken bone may cost \$2,700.² Treating feline kidney disease, meanwhile, can set you back about \$1,300. So, when you make your family's budget, be sure to include your pet in your emergency fund so you're prepared in the event of an emergency illness or injury as well as budgeting for the following:

- Regular preventive health care and dental care
- Costs for treatment of unexpected illness or injury
- Costs for proper nutrition and daily care
- Costs for breed-specific conditions that may arise, such as allergies, skin diseases, heart problems or orthopedic conditions

Pet health insurance is another option, but you must be sure to do your research, as some plans may not cover every illness or injury that may affect your pet. Monthly premiums and deductibles can add up as well, so another option is to put the amount that you would put toward a premium into a savings account that you keep for pet emergencies.

Assuming you're able to find coverage that makes sense for your pet's age, breed and any pre-existing conditions, however, it can help offset unexpected veterinary costs while providing some financial peace of mind.

Keep Your Pet Well With Preventive Strategies

Numerous pet health issues can be avoided or controlled via a healthy lifestyle and proactive integrative veterinary care. By prioritizing preventive wellness measures, you can lower the likelihood of your pet facing costly medical emergencies. Top strategies to keep your pet in the best health include:

- Offer your pet a fresh, well-balanced diet tailored to their species. This supports immune health and weight management. Also ensure your pet stays hydrated by providing fresh, filtered water daily, promoting overall well-being.
- Keep your pet at a healthy weight via species-appropriate proper nutrition and daily aerobic exercise. Excess weight in dogs and cats can shorten lifespan and lead to conditions such as arthritis, bladder and urinary tract disease, liver disease, diabetes and more, so this is one area that's very important for maintaining long-term health.
- Reduce stress, including emotional stress, by providing plenty of mental stimulation. Eliminating environmental stressors and excessive vaccinations or unnecessary medications is also important.
- Maintain regular hygiene practices including nail trimming, ear cleaning and dental care to ensure your pet stays healthy and comfortable.
- Take your pet to a proactive, functional medicine vet at least once a year to identify weak links in your pet's lifestyle or subtle changes in your pet's health that can be addressed and reversed through early intervention.

Sources and References

¹ [PetMD October 4, 2023](#)

² [Forbes January 5, 2024](#)
