

One of the Most Important Pet 'Survival Skills' You Could Learn

When an emergency occurs, seconds count. That's why you want to know this critical survival skill when you have the leisure to learn it right, like right now. So when the unthinkable happens, you're ready to save your pet's life and regain otherwise lost years with her.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If your pet stops breathing and has no pulse, knowing how to perform CPR can save her life
- Locating your dog's heart is one of the first steps, and you can do this now so you're aware of its location in an emergency
- One way critical care vets suggest you remember how to administer CPR is matching chest compressions to the beat of the song Stayin' Alive; give two mouth-to-snout breaths for every 30 chest compressions

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Knowing how to perform basic CPR on your pet is one of the most important skills you can learn. No one expects to find their dog unconscious and in need of urgent medical care — but if the unthinkable happens, knowing CPR can save your pet's life.

Before performing CPR, also known as cardiopulmonary resuscitation, you'll need to evaluate your pet's condition to know whether CPR is needed. First, check if your dog is breathing. Place your hand or cheek near her nose and feel for air. You should also watch to see if her chest is rising and falling.

If your dog isn't breathing, check to see if an object is blocking her airway. Open your dog's mouth, pull her tongue forward and remove any object or liquid in her mouth or throat. You should also check for your dog's pulse.

This is easiest to feel on her femoral artery, which is located on the inner thigh. Press your fingers gently on the area just below where your dog's inner hind leg joins with the body. You can also feel for her pulse just above the large center pad of your dog's front paw or directly on top of her heart.

If your dog does not have a pulse, move on to CPR. If your dog has a pulse but is not breathing, you can skip the chest compressions and move on to artificial mouth-to-snout respiration.

New Dog CPR Guidelines Established in 2012

In 2012, the Journal of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care published new guidelines on how to perform CPR on your dog.¹ These were prompted by a dismal less than 6% survival rate among dogs and cats visiting animal hospitals in cardiopulmonary arrest.

The Reassessment Campaign on Veterinary Resuscitation initiative was created to establish how to best treat cardiopulmonary arrest in dogs and cats, including the best guidelines for CPR.

The steps that follow are a summary of the guidelines, created by initiative co-chair Dr. Daniel J. Fletcher, an associate professor of emergency and critical care at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, as told to USA Today.²

If more than one person is available, put the dog in your car and perform CPR while someone drives to the nearest emergency animal hospital. As Fletcher stated, CPR "is just a bridge to keep blood flowing and keep some oxygen going to the tissues while you're transporting that animal to a veterinarian for care."³

How to Perform CPR on Your Dog

- **Place your dog on his side on the floor**, kneeling behind his back with your knees against his spine (this applies to medium, large and giant-breed dogs).
- **Locate your dog's heart** based on the shape of his chest:
 - **Round chest** — This applies to most dogs (Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, etc.). Put your hands on the widest portion of the chest, at the widest, highest point or top of the dome shape.
 - **Keel-shaped chest** — Greyhounds, Doberman Pinschers and some German Shepherds have this type of chest. With your dog on his side, pull his elbow back across his chest about one-third of the way toward her shoulder; his elbow will point to the location of her heart.
 - **Barrel chest** — For barrel-chested dogs, such as an English Bulldog or Pug, place your hands on his sternum (breastbone) at the center of his chest, similar to where you would place your hands on a human's chest.
 - **Small dogs** — If your dog's chest is small enough to fit in your hand, wrap one hand around her chest and squeeze, which will result in one-handed compressions.
- **Place one hand atop the other and put them over your dog's heart** — Your shoulders should be directly over your hands and your elbows straight and locked. Bend at the waist as you make compressions.
- **Push down and compress the chest about one-third to one-half its width. Compress two times per second, or 100 to 120 compressions per minute** — This is similar in tempo to the beat of the song Stayin' Alive. Continue compressions for two-minute intervals, switching out with another person at that time, if possible, to avoid tiring.
- **After every 30 chest compressions, give two quick breaths to your dog's snout** — To do so, close your dog's mouth (wrap your hands around it if necessary to prevent air leaking out). Extend his neck so the tip of his nose is in a straight line with his spine.
- **Place your mouth over your dog's nose, covering both nostrils** — Create a tight seal with your mouth and give two quick breaths. Continue for another 30 chest compressions and repeat.

Preparing for Emergencies in Advance Can Save Your Pet's Life

All dog owners must become familiar with the CPR guidelines above now, before your dog needs them. When an emergency occurs, you won't have time to start reading through the instructions, and you'll likely be shaken and possibly panicked.

If you already have a firm grasp on how to perform CPR, you can move right into action, as mentioned, preferably in a car while someone drives you and your dog to an emergency animal hospital. You should not, however, practice CPR on a healthy dog, as this can lead to injury.

If you'd like to practice, the American Red Cross offers classes in many areas that allow you to receive hands-on training with an animal mannequin. Remember, too, that learning dog CPR is just one part of preparing for animal emergencies. For a full-fledged emergency plan, read through these seven life-saving steps every pet owner needs to know.

Sources and References

¹ [Journal of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care June 2012, Volume 22, Issue s1](#)

^{2, 3} [USA Today May 21, 2016](#)
