

## 7 Life-Saving Steps That Every Pet Owner Needs to Know

Please don't wait until an emergency happens to start thinking about what you would do. Seconds can determine whether your pet lives or dies. Know the seven steps that will allow you to spring into action if and when an emergency happens. Plus, 13 animal emergencies that require immediate care.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Having an emergency plan in place ahead of time can save your pet's life if and when an emergency medical condition occurs
- Severe bleeding, fractured bones, seizures and ingesting a known poison are examples of emergencies that require immediate veterinary care
- You should decide now which emergency veterinary clinic you'll use and keep an emergency file with important information in a handy place
- It's important not to wait for a true medical emergency to start thinking about emergency care
- Taking 20 minutes now to get prepared can make all the difference if the unexpected happens

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There may come a time in your pet's life when he needs emergency veterinary care. Having a plan in place ahead of time can literally save your pet's life if and when that time comes.

In that moment, the last thing you want to be thinking about is where to go for help and how to get to the emergency clinic. Minutes, and even seconds, may count, so you'll want to be well prepared in advance. Perhaps most important, however, is knowing when to seek emergency care.

If in doubt, contact your veterinarian or emergency veterinary clinic immediately. It's best to err on the side of caution, and if you can't get through to your veterinarian or it's after hours, go directly to your closest emergency veterinary clinic.

### 13 Animal Emergencies That Require Immediate Care

Life-threatening conditions often involve organ failure, sepsis (full-body infection) or bloat, which is a condition in which a dog's stomach becomes distended and twists around on itself.

Disseminated intravascular coagulopathy (DIC) is another life-threatening condition, in this case a bleeding disorder that may result from infection or autoimmune disease.

The 13 medical conditions, symptoms and scenarios that follow, compiled by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), also warrant emergency veterinary attention.<sup>1</sup> This is not an all-inclusive list, but if you notice any of the following, get your pet to an emergency veterinary clinic immediately.

1. Severe bleeding or bleeding that doesn't stop within five minutes
2. Choking, difficulty breathing or nonstop coughing and gagging
3. Bleeding from nose, mouth or rectum; coughing up blood or blood in urine
4. Inability to urinate or pass feces (stool), or obvious pain associated with urinating or passing stool
5. Injuries to your pet's eye(s)
6. You suspect or know your pet has eaten something poisonous (such as antifreeze, xylitol, chocolate, rodent poison, etc.)
7. Seizures and/or staggering
8. Fractured bones, severe lameness or inability to move leg(s)
9. Obvious signs of pain or extreme anxiety
10. Heat stress or heatstroke
11. Severe vomiting or diarrhea — more than two episodes in a 24-hour period, or either of these combined with obvious illness or any of the other problems listed here
12. Refusal to drink for 24 hours or more
13. Unconsciousness

In addition, here are some true medical emergencies to add to this list:

- Penetrating wounds to the chest, including deep lacerations or punctures
- A fever over 104 degrees Fahrenheit with profound lethargy
- Bulging eyes and sudden blindness
- Burns or injuries in which a bone is exposed
- Loss of balance (inability to right herself or falls over due to inability to maintain balance)

## **7 Preparatory Steps That Could Save Your Pet's Life in an Emergency**

It's important not to wait for a true medical emergency to start thinking about emergency care. AVMA recommends knowing the following seven things well in advance so you're ready to spring into action in the event of an actual emergency.<sup>2</sup>

1. Your vet's emergency phone number
2. The local emergency clinic number
3. How to get to the emergency clinic
4. Poison Control number (888-426-4435)
5. How to perform basic CPR on your pet
6. How to stop bleeding/apply a basic pressure wrap

7. How to muzzle your pet (to keep an injured pet from biting you) with a homemade muzzle

Here's a six-step emergency plan to help you prepare well in advance in the event you ever need to take your pet to an emergency veterinary clinic:

1. Deciding which emergency clinic to use
2. Visiting the clinic, or if that's not possible, making a phone call to gather specific information
3. Deciding how you'll pay for emergency services. Keep the credit card information you would use in case of emergencies included in your emergency file
4. Learning about any special policies or procedures the clinic has in place
5. Creating an emergency file to keep on hand
6. Deciding ahead of time how you feel about difficult subjects like invasive procedures, resuscitation and euthanasia

## **What Symptoms Require Urgent, but Not Immediate, Veterinary Care?**

It can be difficult to determine when your pet needs to be seen by a veterinarian immediately and when it's OK to wait until the next morning or later in the week. In many cases, you can go with your gut instinct. If your pet is suffering severely, in pain, unable to perform basic functions like walking, breathing normally or eliminating, or becomes unresponsive or severely agitated, immediate care is required.

More often, however, you're likely to encounter situations that require urgent care, such as within the next 12 hours, but not necessarily a trip to an emergency clinic. Examples of conditions that require urgent care, such as your veterinarian's next available appointment, include:

- Limping
- Lumps
- Rashes
- Parasites
- Mild diarrhea
- Low-grade fever

## **Choking — One Emergency You Should Be Prepared For**

In most emergency situations, it's best to get to an emergency clinic as soon as possible. But if your pet is choking, her life is in immediate danger and she might not make it to a clinic. In this case, taking matters into your own hands could save your pet's life. Choking is most common among dogs (though may also happen in cats). If you have a dog, in particular, you must become familiar with how to perform the Heimlich maneuver.

It's relatively simple and could save your pet's life. Once the object is cleared from your pet's airway, get him to your veterinarian or an emergency clinic immediately. Another tool you can learn now to potentially save your pet's life in an emergency is CPR. The American Red Cross offers classes in many areas that allow you to receive hands-on training with an animal mannequin.

Hopefully you'll never need to use the tips provided in this article, but the truth is that no one ever expects an emergency. Taking 20 minutes now to get prepared can make all the difference if the unexpected happens.

## Sources and References

[AVMA, 7 Things You Should Know in Case of an Emergency with your Pet \(Archived\)](#)

[<sup>1,2</sup> AVMA, 13 Animal Emergencies That Require Immediate Veterinary Consultation and/or Care](#)

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