

FIRST AID FOR DOGS



Emergencies often occur when we least expect them, but a little foresight and common sense will help you to deal with urgent situations. Plan ahead and have some simple supplies handy in case you need them. A pet first aid kit for dogs should include:

- **Phone numbers/business card for us and/or local emergency clinics.** *(If you are out of town, you can still call us but you should be aware of where the nearest veterinary clinic is.)*
- Thermometer
- Scissors
- Bandage material
- Styptic powder
- Neosporin or similar ointment
- Hydrogen peroxide
 - A syringe to administer it is also helpful
- Vomiting and diarrhea medications:
Famotidine (Pepcid™) or omeprazole (Prilosec™), and loperamide (Imodium-AD™)
 - Do not give loperamide to a herding breed dog without MDR1 testing
- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl)
 - It must be just diphenhydramine without any decongestant added
- Buffered aspirin or prescription pet pain medication
 - Always call us for a dosage before giving any human medication

Never give any human medication without calling us for a dosage and safety information. Some human medications, including ibuprofen and acetaminophen, can be fatal to pets!

Call us anytime for advice on what to do in an emergency. If you know your pet needs to be seen, it may be faster to go directly to Lakeshore Veterinary Specialty & Emergency Hospital. They are able to offer a much higher level of care after hours than we can. Just as the emergency room is the appropriate place to go if you are having a stroke or heart attack, Lakeshore is the most appropriate place to go for a serious after-hours emergency with your pet.

The following are some of the most common emergencies we see, with advice on what to do.

1) Poisons and toxins - pills, ant traps, chocolate, raisins, plants, etc.

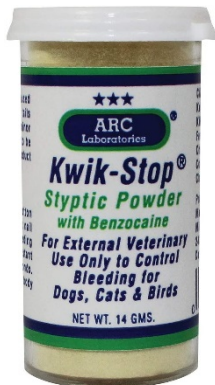
Call us immediately! Depending on what it is, we may have you make your dog vomit, give another home remedy, call the poison control hotline for pets or rush your dog to the emergency center. **The poison control hotline number is (888) 426-4435. There is a fee for their services.**

Better than having a first aid kit or home remedies on hand is spending the time to pet-proof your home in the first place. Never leave medication containers where pets can get at them. Bedside tables, dressers, and kitchen counters are not good places to

leave small items of any kind. We have heard countless times "I never thought he would try to eat that!" Keep cabinets and closets closed, pick up your kids' toys and don't give your dog toys that aren't safe.

2) Torn toenail/toenail cut too short

For this common injury, the goal is to get the bleeding to stop. A pet is unlikely to bleed to death from a torn toenail but it can sure look like a lot of blood and make a big mess in your car or on your rugs and furniture. Apply pressure to the bleeding area for a few minutes, then apply a bandage if the dog will permit. Even if it doesn't stay on long, it should still help reduce the bleeding and the mess. If part of the nail is dangling it may need to be removed, or a sturdy bandage may be needed to protect the exposed quick until it heals. If your dog is painful or you cannot get the bleeding to stop, give us a call.



There are two first aid products that work for bleeding toenails, either one of which can be kept in your pet first aid kit. The first is styptic powder, which can usually be found in drug stores – it's what people use when they cut themselves shaving, The veterinary product we stock is called Kwik-Stop.

The second product is the silver nitrate stick. These are 6" long Q-tip like devices, with silver nitrate on one end to press against the bleeding area. Silver nitrate is easier to use than messy powder but it can also stain your hands dark brown if you touch it, and it stings more when applied.

If you don't have these products on hand, you can try cornstarch instead. If you trim your dog's toenails yourself, you should absolutely have one of these products handy. It is very easy to trim nails too short and cause bleeding.

To prevent torn toenails, have dangling dewclaws removed surgically, especially if your dog will spend a lot of time in brush or high weeds. Keep toenails cut to a healthy length. Long nails catch and break. Work with your dog from puppy-hood on to get him used to having his feet and toes touched and handled. If you don't cut the toenails yourself be sure to have it done regularly here or by a groomer.

3) Cuts & bite wounds

These run the gamut from superficial scrapes to gaping wounds and deep punctures. They can bleed a little or a lot. In general, if the cut is small and bleeding has stopped, it can probably wait until the next day. If muscles, tissue, or tendon is exposed it will probably need sutures. Sometimes we can do this with local anesthesia and a few skin staples. Antibiotics will usually be needed. Pain medication may also be required. Call us and we will help you decide if the injury requires the pet to be seen, and if so, how urgently. Bleeding that cannot be controlled is always urgent.



Wounds that could have punctured the chest, abdomen or airway are also always critical.

Bite wounds are usually a serious concern as far as infection risk. There can often be extensive damage to muscles and other tissue underneath the skin, even if the skin puncture is small. In severe cases surgery is imperative and your pet will need drains placed pain medications and treatment for bruising and swelling.

For small wounds, some first aid cream or Neosporin and a bandage may do the trick. Be very careful not to bandage too tightly, and never leave a bandage on more than a few days without taking it off to see what is happening underneath.

4) Diarrhea

Save a sample. (Keep it in the refrigerator until you can bring it in.) Many times that's all we need to look at to diagnose the problem. Without it, we can't always tell what medication will be needed. If your dog is eating well and acting OK otherwise, we can often examine the stool sample and dispense medication. If your pet is feeling ill, vomiting, is a puppy, or has other serious health issues, we will probably want to see your pet as well. We cannot dispense prescription medications without seeing the pet for an examination within the past year.

Home care will usually include feeding lightly until the dog is feeling better, and either feeding prescription food for digestive upsets or mixing up a homemade bland diet. This is usually half and half of a carbohydrate source such as rice or noodles (no butter), and a protein source such as low-fat cottage cheese or boiled ground beef (drain the fat off). Just as you would eat some plain rice in broth or dry toast if you were recovering from a stomachache, bland is best.

Immodium-AD™, the human anti-diarrheal medication, works well for dogs, too. You should keep some on hand (or generic 2 mg loperamide). The dosage is 1 tablet per 60 lbs. of bodyweight every 8 hours until the stool is normal again. Usually this will be in 2-3 days. Do not give loperamide to your dog without calling us if he or she is on other medications, is elderly, a young puppy or has health problems. If your dog is a herding breed, such as a border collie or Australian shepherd, do not give loperamide unless your pet has been DNA tested for MDR1. Immodium-AD does not cure the cause of the diarrhea; it simply treats the symptoms, so other medications may be needed as well.

If you know your dog got into the garbage or ate something he shouldn't have, the problem should resolve within a day or two. If you don't have a cause to explain it or the pet does not quickly improve, call us. Dogs often have small amounts of blood or mucous in their stools with diarrhea. This, too, should resolve quickly or we need to take a look.

5) Vomiting

Mild vomiting can be treated at home. Call us for advice. **Do not give Pepto Bismol, as this can make things worse.** There are over 100 different causes of vomiting and diarrhea in pets, ranging from minor digestive upset to life threatening stomach torsion or Addison's disease. The sicker the pet seems to feel, the more he or she vomits or the greater the quantity of vomit produced the more urgently we need to see the dog. Vomiting blood or bile is usually more serious than vomiting foam or food.

If you wait too long and your pet gets dehydrated, treatment will become more expensive. It's usually best to call us for advice or to schedule an exam sooner rather than later. As with diarrhea, bland diet may be helpful for a few days.

6) Sore back/anal glands/tail

We often get calls when a dog is suddenly acting painful or strange. If the dog is walking a little hunched, can't or won't climb stairs or jump onto the furniture, cries with movement or refuses to move at all, it is may be due to a slipped disc in the neck or lower back. This is extremely painful, as it is for people, and should be looked at as soon as possible.



Acting strangely, keeping the tail tucked or hiding can mean impacted or infected anal glands. This, too, needs to be taken care of quickly as the dog is quite uncomfortable. If the anal glands are infected, antibiotics will be needed.

Dogs will also tuck their tails if the tail itself is bruised or broken.

7) Lameness

Mild lameness is not an emergency. Rest and perhaps some pain medication are usually required. Many clients keep carprofen or other pain medication on hand in case it's needed. Sometimes we can give you a dosage for aspirin over the phone, though aspirin is not always well tolerated by dogs. Many human anti-inflammatory drugs are not safe for pets, including ibuprofen, Aleve, and many others. Don't give any human medications to pets without calling us first!

Restrict exercise until your pet is no longer lame and then for at least a few extra days. After that, gradually return to normal exercise. The longer a pet is lame, the slower you should return to his usual activities. For little dogs, you may need to restrict access to beds or other furniture – jumping up and down is usually not good for an injured limb.

Severe lameness, inability to use a limb or walk on it, or seeing it dangling or at a strange angle, signifies an emergency. If you don't think your pet could have hurt itself badly enough to have broken something, it's OK to wait an hour or so before calling us, to see if the pet quickly gets better, but if something could be broken, more damage will be done if the limb is not stabilized.

One of the most common injuries in the hind legs is a torn cruciate ligament, which may require surgery. These dogs are usually very lame for the first few weeks and then appear to improve. Unfortunately, without proper treatment, arthritis will quickly set in and cause serious damage. As a rule of thumb, any lameness lasting more than a few days should be investigated.

8) Bee sting

Sudden swelling of the face, a paw or other area often follows a bee or wasp sting. For larger dogs, human diphenhydramine (Benadryl) may be used. The human



tablets or capsules are usually too large for very small dogs. Call us for a dosage. Aspirin or other anti-inflammatories may also help, as may ice packing. Again, do not use non-aspirin products on dogs and always call us for a dose. There are many

This dog has swollen lips, muzzle and eyelids after a bee sting.

different formulations of these products, too many to give a blanket recommendation here.

9) Heat stroke

Prevention again is key here. Don't ever leave pets in the car on warm days. Provide shade if your dog is outside in the sunshine. Panting is not a very efficient way to dissipate excess heat – don't expect your dog to keep up with you on your 4 mile run on a hot day. He should be sleeping at home in the shade. We see more heat stroke on the first few warm days in June when pets are not yet accustomed to hot weather, so take it easy as the weather changes.

If your dog becomes lethargic or collapses, is panting heavily, the tongue looks bluish or dark red, or he vomits, emergency treatment is vital. Cool your dog down with cool water from a hose or in a small pool or bathtub, or use ice packs wrapped in moist towels. You can apply rubbing alcohol to the paws, ear flaps (don't get it in the eyes), and along the back every few minutes to provide evaporative cooling. A small bottle of rubbing alcohol can be carried on a hike or hunt for this purpose.

If you have a rectal thermometer, take the temperature repeatedly. If your pet has heat stroke it will usually be 104° – 106° to start with. The goal is to continue cooling until the temperature is down to 103 degrees. The temperature should continue to come down by itself after that. Normal temperature for a dog is 101-102 degrees F.

10) Weak/pale/down

If your dog staggers, can't get up seems weak or disoriented, or if the gums look pale, call us or Lakeshore immediately. **Do not wait!**

Any time a pet is ill, the first place we look is at the gums (except in black-pigmented pets), because they tell us so much about circulation, shock, abnormal bleeding and other problems. If you call us and say your pet isn't feeling well we may ask you right away to look at the gums. Yellow coloring may indicate a liver or bleeding disorder. Pale or white gums signify shock or anemia.

One of the most common cancers we see in large breed dogs occurs in the liver or spleen and can cause bleeding into the abdominal cavity. These dogs will become weak and pale from blood loss, with no bleeding visible from the outside.



This dog has severe abdominal pain. He is depressed, not moving, and standing in an odd position.

Another simple test is called the CRT or capillary refill time. Press your finger on the gum to blanch it, lift your finger, and then count how many seconds it takes the gum to turn pink again. Less than 2 seconds is normal. Greater than that may indicate shock or poor circulation.

11) Seizures

A brief seizure is not a critical emergency. Seizures lasting more than five minutes or occurring in clusters are. Often by the time a pet owner calls us, the seizure is over and the pet looks fine again. In those cases, we usually recommend an exam within the next day or two. If the pet continues to seizure, he or she will need to be seen immediately.

12) Hot spots

Sudden itching, redness, and pain on an area of skin may be a hot spot. The hair may be missing or wet and matted in that area. This is a moist, superficial skin infection that can quickly spread and become a major problem. If you catch it early you can clip the hair around the area and use antibiotic/cortisone cream. If it gets worse, we need to see the dog ASAP.



13) Head tilt

If your dog suddenly can't get up and/or is walking with the head tilted to one side, his balance is being affected by a brain or inner ear problem. You might also notice vomiting or the eyes may flick back and forth in a strange manner. The three main causes of this are vestibular disease, which will get better on its own within a few days, a middle ear infection, which requires antibiotics, or a stroke. We should see your pet right away for the best chance of complete recovery. Home care is not appropriate.

14) Eye swollen, held closed, red, bulging, or injured

There are many serious and potentially blinding or painful eye diseases. Call us and describe the symptoms and we'll decide whether it can wait or needs to be seen immediately. If in doubt, head to the emergency clinic. Don't take chances with your dog's sight!



Emergencies that require immediate veterinary care, and for which home first aid is not sufficient:

- Choking/gagging/retching/drooling/inability to swallow
- Labored or noisy breathing
- Inability to urinate
- Unproductive retching accompanied by distress/abnormal behavior (could mean bloat or twisted stomach)
- Pain/screaming/moaning/inability to sleep comfortably
- Abnormal color to tongue or gums – pale, blue, jaundiced, dark red
- Bruising of gums or skin
- Distended or swollen abdomen
- Burns
- Severe itching or scratching, especially if the skin is bleeding
- Severe cough or cough accompanied by lethargy or discolored gums
- Injury to the eye or face