



# First aid for dogs

What is the reason for Dog First Aid?

- saving life
- reducing pain
- relieving suffering
- promoting recovery

## When should dog first aid be used?

Immediately following an accident or sudden illness. First aid should be restricted to what is necessary to save an animal's life, to reduce pain and therefore to stop suffering until the animal receives attention by a veterinary surgeon. It is usually much better to take the dog to the vet, rather than calling the vet to your home as they will be better equipped at the surgery to carry out the correct treatment required.

## Who can carry out first aid?

First aid can be administered to an animal by anyone. It is not necessary to make a diagnosis of injury to provide effective first aid; indeed diagnosis can only be made legally by a qualified veterinary surgeon.

Be prepared and have the following things ready in your home so you are prepared for any incident:

- a dog first aid kit – your vet can advise on what to keep in here
- the phone number and address of your vet – including any alternative emergency number for night time or weekend incidents
- a pen and paper (you may wish to note down the vet's instructions)
- a clean large blanket which may be used as a stretcher if needed

Remember, try not to panic - an emergency situation will require you to be speedy, calm and most importantly safe. Try to think slowly and act fast.

It is vital to remember that a sudden illness or injury will cause your dog to be potentially very scared, in pain/discomfort and shock. In this very high stress situation even docile dogs can bite and you must ensure your own safety. Having a muzzle or a piece of material (eg an old tie) to use as a 'tape muzzle' will allow you to aid your dog confidently. Tape muzzles cause no harm to your dog and reduce any risk of harm to you.

## Never rush straight to your veterinary surgery without telephoning first

It may be that emergencies are seen at a different site/branch, or that the vet could give you vital advice before you travel with your dog. It may also be possible that there is no vet at the surgery at that specific time.

## Never give a sick or injured dog anything to eat or drink unless the vet tells you to do so.

All Vets are required to provide an emergency 24 hour service, 365 days a year and your pet will always benefit from seeing a familiar vet. Always try your own vets first.

## Holidays

If you take your dog on holiday, make sure you know how to contact the local veterinary surgeon. Local tourist information centres should be able to give you this information.

### Top first aid tips and advice:

**1. General advice** - Injured dogs may be frightened and in pain and should always be approached with caution. Unless otherwise indicated, try to ensure your dog is moved around as little as possible and is kept warm and dry.

**2. Vomiting** - Any prolonged or repeated vomiting, or if your dog is lethargic or in obvious pain, must be checked by a vet. It is advisable not to feed your dog until you have seen the vet.

**3. Diarrhoea** - Diarrhoea will resolve quicker if food is maintained but it must be bland, easy to digest and given little and often. Diarrhoea is generally slow to resolve but should gradually improve and have cleared in five days. If the diarrhoea is ongoing, watery or there is blood present they should always be seen by a vet.

**4. Road traffic accidents** - Let your dog see you approaching and avoid sudden movement and noise; try and speak gently to reassure your dog. Ensure there is no further danger to your dog or yourself and minimise movement. Keep your dog warm and get to the veterinary surgery as soon as possible.

**5. Cuts and grazes** - Bathe the wound with salt water or a veterinary antibacterial solution and then keep the wound clean and dry. Do not allow your dog to lick at the wound and you should seek veterinary attention unless a minor cut/graze.

**6. Deep cuts / bleeding** - Do not interfere with the wound. Apply direct pressure to the area to stop the bleeding and indirect pressure if possible to the area above the bleeding. Try and raise the affected area above the body until you can get your dog to the veterinary surgery.

**7. Stings** - Pull out the sting if possible; bathe with salt solution or a veterinary antibacterial solution. Bicarbonate of soda can be applied to bee stings and vinegar to wasp stings to reduce the effects. If irritant or painful or any swelling develops then an appointment with your vet is advisable. This is a non-emergency unless any breathing difficulties, swelling around the face, your dog becomes very lethargic or starts panting excessively, in which case it should be seen as an emergency.

**8. Heat Stroke** - Apply copious amounts of cool water gently all over your dog and if available position near a fan to aid cooling. You should open car windows and/or put on the air conditioning on the journey to the vets. Do not immerse your dog in icy water or place soaked towels over the body. In this situation, your dog should be seen by a vet immediately. Avoid any non-steroidal drugs.

**9. Choking / drowning / collapse** - You should never endanger yourself if your dog is drowning. Try where possible to ensure your dog's airway is free from obstruction. In a drowning situation, if possible your dog can be gently swung by the hind limbs to try and allow water to drain from the lungs. If your dog is choking try to ascertain whether this is a continual choking due to a foreign object in the mouth/throat, ie a ball or stick. If it is a more intermittent choking it could be a less serious problem, but should still be checked out by your vet.

**10. Seizures / fitting** - Most seizures last no more than 5-10 minutes and are usually over by the time the dog arrives at the veterinary surgery. If a seizure is 10 minutes in duration or multiple seizures come close together you need to see a vet immediately. Otherwise it is best to let the seizure pass and allow your dog to recover before attempting to take them to the surgery. During a seizure ensure your dog is unable to harm itself (moving furniture if necessary), keep lighting down

and noise to a minimum. You should talk to your dog, but do not attempt to put your hands near the mouth. Once the seizure is over your dog will often be disorientated for up to two hours and probably thirsty so it is important to ensure that water is readily available.

**11. Suspected poisoning** - If possible you should always take the poison/packaging to the veterinary surgery (or a specimen of the plant if a plant was the poison). You should never try to make your dog sick. Your vet will likely consult the Veterinary Poisons Information Service (VPIS) for advice in most cases of suspected poisoning.

**12. Suspected spinal injuries / fractures** - Take care to move your dog carefully, keeping the spine and head, or affected limb as straight as possible. Sudden lameness or acute pain will be seen and the limb may look abnormal. Your dog may be distressed and unwilling to move. It is important to try and keep your dog still to try and reduce further damage but do not try to reposition the affected limb.

**13. Contaminated coat** - This could be the case if your dog appears to have oil, tar or an unknown substance on its coat or feet. A number of substances can be potentially toxic to dogs so you should try to prevent your dog licking the area. Try to clean the area with a mild soapy water solution and rinse off prior to your appointment with the vet. If large areas are contaminated your pet may require clipping and possibly washing under sedation.

**14. Whelping (giving birth)** - If your dog has been straining non-productively for more than 30 minutes you should seek veterinary advice. If a green discharge in a bitch that is not straining is seen, this could be an emergency and she should be checked immediately. If you are able to transport your dog that has already produced some puppies, you must handle them all with care – new mothers can be very protective!

**15. Bite wounds** - A vet should see all bite wounds, regardless of the size as serious infection can arise. If possible you can bathe the wound with saline solution or a veterinary antibacterial solution. You should then keep the wound clean and dry.

**16. Snake bites** - The only poisonous snake native to the UK is the adder, which is common on heath land and forest area during the spring and summer months. Swelling and discomfort occurs rapidly around the area of the bite and the toxin can cause shock. If you suspect an adder bite your dog must be seen by a vet immediately.

**17. Electric shocks** - You must never touch your dog until the electric supply has been turned off. You should then apply general first aid advice as with burns.

**18. Eye injuries** -

- If the eye is bulging or has come out of its socket apply a cold compress. Your dog should be seen at a veterinary surgery as a matter of urgency
- If there is a foreign object visible in the eye try to prevent your dog from rubbing it and arrange an emergency appointment with your vet
- If an irritant in the eye you should bathe with warm water - do not rub the eye surface. Note the chemical's name and seek immediate veterinary advice.

**Disclaimer Note: The above information and advice is for general information only. It is not intended to be a substitute for a veterinary examination and/or specific treatment or advice. You should always seek advice from your veterinary surgeon in the case of an emergency.**