

Canine First-Aid

SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS

Recognizing symptoms of illness, in many instances, is crucial to providing successful treatment. Some common symptoms which indicate illness include:

listlessness- fever (above 102.5°F)- loss of appetite- vomiting- diarrhea- cough- excessive thirst- restlessness- discharge from eyes or nose- difficulty breathing- frequent urination- lameness- swelling- loss of fur- abdominal distention

Emergencies that may require first aid are the result of automobile accidents, animal or snake bites, cuts, burns, electric shock, heat stroke, poisoning, or insect bites and stings. First aid measures serve only to keep the dog alive and relieve pain for the amount of time it takes to get to a veterinarian. When providing first aid, the most serious threats to life are treated first. If the dog is bleeding profusely, an attempt should be made to stop the bleeding before doing anything else. Assuming that a dog has been badly injured, these steps might be taken:

1. Call your veterinarian for advice.
2. Try to stop any hemorrhage. Severe bleeding must receive immediate attention no matter what other injuries are present.
3. Be sure that the dog can breathe freely. Its nose and mouth must be clear to allow air passage.
4. Avoid changing the dog's position when it must be moved. Young (small) dogs should be carried in a person's arms or in a box or basket. Adult (large) dogs should be carried by two people using a blanket as a stretcher. When injured dogs are hysterical or semi-conscious, they should be muzzled before being moved.
5. Keep the dog's body warm but not hot.
6. Cover any superficial wound with a clean bandage.
7. Give no food or liquids in case emergency surgery is required.

Hemorrhage:

Serious bleeding is usually associated with trauma. When external and severe, the bleeding is often best controlled by applying a pressure bandage directly over the bleeding site. If this is not successful in controlling arterial bleeding (loss of bright red, spurting blood) from a leg wound, a tourniquet may be needed. Elastic rubber bands or bandages are suitable for tourniquets. They should be applied several inches above the bleeding site with only enough pressure to stop the bleeding. The tourniquet should be slowly released about every 15 minutes and then reapplied until the bleeding can be controlled with a pressure bandage. When there is evidence of internal hemorrhage (pale mucous membranes and collapse), the dog should be kept quiet and covered with a light blanket or towel.

Shock:

This condition is basically a failure in blood circulation. It can result from loss of blood, severe pain, severe physical and emotional stress, extensive tissue damage, or protracted vomiting. Shock is often a consequence of automobile injury. When suffering from shock, a dog may appear to be unconscious or semiconscious. Its mucous membranes will be pale and cold, its breathing will be rapid and shallow, its pulse will be feeble and rapid, and its body temperature will be subnormal. A dog in shock is in immediate danger of dying. A dog that appears to be in shock should be kept as quiet as possible. It should be positioned with its head slightly lower than the body, and covered with a light blanket or towel.

Fractures:

The signs of fracture include pain and swelling at the fracture site. The dog will usually be unwilling to use a fractured leg for support. With vertebral fractures, the dog may be paralyzed. When a leg bone is fractured, the leg may appear to be shortened and deformed. Every effort should be made to move the dog carefully and in such a way that its body is kept as immobile as possible.

Wounds:

Open wounds in which the skin is penetrated include:

1. Those made by sharp objects, such as glass or a knife. These wounds bleed freely.
2. Those resulting from bites of other animals or tears by such objects as barbed wire. These wounds are irregular in shape and also bleed freely.
3. Puncture wounds caused by sharp-pointed objects, such as thorns, nails, bullets, fish hooks. External bleeding from these wounds may or may not be considerable.

When dogs suffer open wounds that are recently (10-30 minutes) inflicted, cold compresses and a pressure bandage can be applied to control bleeding and swelling. The dog should be treated for shock if blood loss is excessive. If the object that caused the wound is still present, **DO NOT REMOVE IT**. Make every effort to move the animal carefully and keep it and the object immobile.

Burns:

First-aid care of dogs that have suffered superficial burns is essentially the same as that provided for other wounds. Applying cold compresses to the burned area will help to relieve pain until one can reach the veterinarian.

Heatstroke:

This emergency obviously occurs during warmer days of the year. Affected dogs have usually been confined, often in an automobile, where ventilation is poor. The most common signs include exaggerated and loud panting, rapid pulse, weakness, vomiting, and a body temperature of 104°F-106°F or higher. The mucous membranes appear very red at the onset, and then become pale as the dog goes into shock. Some dogs eliminate blood-tinged, liquid feces. Affected dogs can be helped by putting them immediately in a tub of cold water or applying cold water liberally with a hose. If this does not reduce the body temperature within a short time (10 minutes), the veterinarian will give the dog a cold-water enema.