Pet Medical & Basic First Aid Guide
Reasons to Visit a Veterinarian

When puppies and kittens are born, their mothers’ milk provides some of the natural protection against diseases. There is no way of knowing how strong that protection may be. The amount of immunity can vary from animal to animal, even in littermates. It is important to have an understanding about infectious diseases that could affect your pet.

Most of the common infectious diseases can be prevented with vaccines. An annual check-up by a licensed veterinarian is important to your pet’s continued health. Your veterinarian will recommend a vaccination schedule to fit the needs of your pet. Your veterinarian will also attend to the overall health of your pet by performing health screenings in eyes, ears, teeth, skin, coat, nail care, and parasite control. Parasite control will include both internal parasites (worms) and external parasites (fleas and ticks). The following are common diseases that affect pets. Make sure to discuss these and other diseases with your veterinarian.
Emergency Equipment

Muzzle
Fitted muzzles are available at most pet retail stores. If you don’t have one available, use a strip of soft cloth, rope, neck-tie, or nylon stocking. Wrap around the nose, under the chin and tie behind the ears. Care must be taken when handling weak or injured pets. Even normally docile pets may bite when in pain. Allow the pet to pant after handling by loosening or removing the muzzle. Do not use a muzzle in a case of vomiting. Cats and small pets may be difficult to muzzle. A towel placed around the head helps control small pets. Always ensure the pet can breathe during restraint.

Stretcher

Pet First Aid Kit
Consult with your veterinarian about putting together a pet first aid kit. This kit should include things like:

- Thermometer
- Sterile lubrication
- 2"x2" gauze bandages
- 3"x3" gauze bandages
- 2"x4.1 yd. conforming gauze roll bandage
- 3"x4.1 yd. conforming gauze roll bandage
- Burn relief gel pack
- Antiseptic cleansing wipes
- Hydrogen peroxide
- 1"x5 yd. first aid tape
- Antibiotic ointment packs
- Scissors
- 10cc syringe
- Tweezers
- 6’ Leash
- Large exam-quality vinyl gloves
- 5"x9" trauma pad
- 2"x5 yd. cohesive bandage wrap
- Insect sting relief pads
- Eye wash
- 3" cotton tipped applicators
- Pet first aid guide

Common Dog Diseases

Distemper
Canine distemper is a contagious, often fatal viral disease that affects the respiratory, gastrointestinal, and central nervous systems. Distemper is caused by the canine distemper virus referred to as CDV. Young puppies between three and six months old are most susceptible to infection and are more likely to die than infected adults. Non-immunized older dogs are also highly susceptible to infection.

The initial sign is a fever of 103°F to 106°F, which usually peaks three to six days after infection. The fever often goes unnoticed and may peak again a few days later. Dogs may experience eye and nasal discharge, depression, loss of appetite, diarrhea, lethargy, and convulsions. After the fever, signs vary considerably, depending on the strain of the virus and the dog’s immunity. Many dogs experience gastrointestinal and respiratory signs. Since there is no cure for distemper, treatment is supportive.

Canine Influenza
Canine influenza is a viral respiratory infection. It is very similar to human influenza. So far, there have been no cases where humans have been infected. The most common signs of canine influenza include nasal discharge and a dry or moist cough that can last up to 30 days. These signs usually appear within two to five days after a dog has been exposed to the virus. Other signs include fever, loss of appetite, depression, and difficulty breathing in severe cases. As with other viral infections, canine influenza treatment includes supportive care. Canine influenza is transmitted via airborne or direct contact with an infected dog, most likely by an infected
dog sneezing or coughing on another. To prevent the spread of the virus, it is recommended to visit your vet and isolate other animals from the infected dog.

**Hepatitis**
Infectious canine hepatitis is a highly contagious viral disease affecting the liver and other organs and is caused by Canine Adenovirus type 1 (CAV-1). It is spread only among domestic dogs and wild dogs such as wolves, coyotes, and foxes and is not related to human hepatitis. Signs range widely, from mild to severe, and include nausea, fever, vomiting, hemorrhage, loss of appetite, jaundice, light-colored stool, and swelling. Hepatitis can be fatal if not treated early.

**Leptospirosis**
Leptospirosis is a disease caused by a type of bacteria called spirochete. The disease is transmitted by wild and domestic animals through urine, which infects water sources and soil. The bacteria can survive in the environment for up to six months, infecting dogs and other wild mammals.

The bacteria infects animals through ingestion, splashing into the eyes, or through a break in the skin. Dogs are commonly infected when they swim in standing water such as ponds or reservoirs. Once infected, dogs pose a risk to humans and other animals by shedding the bacteria. Although most infections are mild, in severe cases kidney and liver damage can occur. Even when signs disappear, dogs may shed the bacteria in their urine for up to a year.

Signs of leptospirosis include fever, loss of appetite, vomiting, lethargy, depression, muscle pain, diarrhea, and blood in the urine. In severe cases, dogs may exhibit jaundice.

**Hookworms**
Hookworms are parasites that get their name from the hook-like mouth parts they use to attach to the intestinal wall of a pet. Despite their small size, they suck large amounts of blood from the tiny vessels in the intestinal wall. In large numbers, hookworms can cause anemia. This problem is most common in puppies, but it will occasionally occur in adult dogs. Puppies can be born with hookworms in the intestinal track. Adult hookworms may infect humans as the larvae can burrow into human skin and cause itching.

**Tapeworms**
This parasite attaches to the small intestinal wall by hook-like mouthparts. The most common tapeworm in animals occurs by swallowing a flea that contains tapeworm eggs. Worms can be expelled and may be invisible in bowel movements. Although very rare, humans can become infected if they ingest an infected flea.

**Roundworms**
These worms have round bodies. They live in the dog’s intestines and eat undigested food. They are different from hookworms in that they do not attach to the intestinal wall. Puppies and adult dogs may become infected by swallowing infected roundworm eggs. Often, mothers will pass roundworms to puppies when they are nursing. People are at risk of developing roundworms if exposed to infected domestic pets. Preventative treatment is available with heartworm medications.
Seizures
Signs include salivation, loss of control of urine or stool, violent muscle twitching, and loss of consciousness. Move the animal away from potentially harmful objects. Use a blanket for padding and protection. Do not attempt to restrain the pet during the seizure. Time the seizure (they usually last only two to three minutes). Afterwards, keep the animal calm and quiet.

Shock
Signs include irregular breathing and dilated pupils. This condition may occur with serious injury or fright. Keep the animal gently restrained, quiet, and warm with the lower body elevated. Seek veterinary care immediately.

Vomiting
Withhold food for 12-24 hours. Give ice cubes for two hours after vomiting stops and slowly increase the amount of water and food over a 24-hour period.

Dog and Cat Parasites

Ringworm
Ringworm is a common disease in dogs and cats. Unlike its name, ringworm is not a worm but rather fungi that thrives on dead skin. Ringworm is an infectious skin disease and a pet usually picks it up from its surroundings. A sign of ringworm can be a circular patch that is inflamed and may appear flaky. The most common areas where it occurs are faces, ear tips, tails, and paws. People should take extra care when handling an animal with ringworm, as it is an contagious infectious disease.

Parovirus
Parovirus is highly-contagious intestinal virus, which is often fatal and can affect dogs at any age.
Parovirus is a close relative of feline panleukopenia virus. The virus is transmitted by oral ingestion of viral-contaminated feces. The virus infects the local lymph nodes, quickly multiplies, and then moves through the blood to the small intestine. It attacks the lining of the intestines, interfering with digestion and absorption of nutrients. Bacteria and toxins move into the bloodstream, often resulting in death to dogs of any age. This disease is most common among young dogs with immune systems that are not fully developed.

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Coronavirus
Coronavirus is an intestinal virus in the same family as parvo-virus. Its signs include fever, depression, diarrhea, vomiting, and dehydration. Normally it is not fatal if treated early.

Respiratory Infections
Respiratory infections usually occur in dogs when they are around a large number of other dogs, such as when they are boarded in kennels. Exposure to dust, mold, pollution, and smoke can also affect a dog's respiratory functions. There are several common respiratory ailments, all caused by different bacterial and viral agents.

Most commonly referred to as “kennel cough,” signs include a harsh, dry, hacking cough. In some cases the cough is accompanied by vomiting (usually phlegm only), decreased appetite, and depression.
Rabies
Rabies is a viral disease that affects the central nervous system, causing encephalitis and ultimately death of mammals including people. Rabies is most commonly transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. Signs vary depending on the stage of the disease. Signs may include altered disposition, loss of appetite, fever, restlessness, outbursts of aggression, convulsions, and paralysis. Once the signs appear, the disease is not treatable and always fatal.

All dogs and cats should be vaccinated yearly. Make sure you discuss a vaccination schedule with your veterinarian.

Heartworm
Heartworms are large worms that live in the heart and, at times, the posterior rina cava. They reproduce and create microfilaria (baby worms) in the blood. When an infected mosquito bites a dog, the microfilaria are transmitted by the mosquito and the disease is spread.

Adult heartworms in the heart die and obstruct the major blood vessels of a dog’s lungs. The severity of signs depends on the number and size of the worms. The most common signs of heartworm include dry cough, shortness of breath, loss of appetite, weight loss, weakness, and fatigue. In more serious cases, fluid will accumulate in the belly and may cause noticeable swelling.

Your veterinarian can test your dog for the presence of heartworms. If the dog is free of heartworms, it should be started on preventative medication. If the dog has heartworms, ask your veterinarian about treatment. Dogs should be kept on preventative medication throughout their lives.

Some of the signs of heatstroke:
- Body temperature greater than 104°F
- Collapse
- Bloody diarrhea/vomiting
- Increased heart and breathing rates
- Excessive salivation
- Gum color appears to be redder than normal
- Appears drunk or disoriented (wobbling when trying to walk)
- Restlessness or lethargy

If you notice a combination of these signs, immediate action must be taken to lower the pet’s body core temperature. Remember that it is important not to lower the pet’s temperature too quickly, or the animal can go into shock.

Here are some tips:
- Remove the animal from the heat source
- Take the animal’s temperature
- Spray the animal with cool (not cold) water.
- Cover the animal with wet towels soaked with cool water
- If available, turn on a fan and point it directly at the animal
- Provide ice cubes for the animal

Poisoning
Signs include vomiting, convulsions, diarrhea, salivation, weakness, depression, pain, and death.

Determine what the pet ingested and how much of it was ingested. Call your veterinarian or poison control center immediately. Do not induce vomiting. If there are toxins or chemicals on the skin, request instructions on how to proceed.
Fractures
Signs include pain, inability to use a limb, or a limb at an odd angle. Muzzle the pet and check for bleeding. If you can control bleeding without causing more injury, do so. **Do not attempt to set the fracture** by pulling or tugging on the limb. Support the injured area as best you can. Contact your veterinarian as soon as possible.

Heatstroke
In the sunny state of Florida, heatstroke is extremely common in animals. How quickly you react to your pet’s signs can mean the difference between life and death. When a pet’s temperature rises above 104°F, it is considered heatstroke. There are some key things that can be done to prevent this from happening:

- Never leave a pet alone outside during the hot weather without adequate fresh water and shade, and limit the time the animal is outside.
- Never leave a pet alone in a vehicle. The temperature inside a car can rise rapidly, even during the cooler months. It does not take long for the temperature in a closed vehicle to skyrocket above 110°F.
- Do not take your pet for long walks during the summer months without taking breaks, and always take with you a portable water source.

A pet’s normal temperature ranges between 100.5°F and 101.5°F when resting. During exercise, it is quite normal for the temperature to be around 102°F to 103°F. The best way to accurately take a dog’s temperature is rectally. The scanners used in the cars for people do not work on animals due to the anatomy of the ear canal.

Common Cat Diseases

Panleukopenia
Feline Panleukopenia (FP) is a highly-contagious viral disease of cats caused by the feline parvovirus. It is commonly known as feline distemper, but it should not be confused with canine distemper. Though sharing the same name, they are different diseases caused by different viruses; neither are transmissible to people. The panleukopenia virus kills rapidly dividing body cells. This cell loss makes a cat more susceptible to other complications and bacterial infections. Signs include fever, loss of appetite, vomiting, depression, diarrhea, and dehydration. Normally this disease is fatal.

Rhinotracheitis
The most severe and widespread of feline respiratory viruses, rhinotracheitis affects cats and kittens of any age. Rhinotracheitis is characterized by a variety of respiratory signs including sneezing, nasal discharge, rhinitis (inflammation of the nose), and conjunctivitis (inflammation of the membrane lining the eyelid). It also affects the reproductive tract and can cause complications during pregnancy. Treatment is difficult and limited to supportive and symptomatic therapy. Infected cats that recover become carriers for life and shed the virus intermittently, especially during times of stress.

Calicivirus
Calicivirus is a widespread, highly-contagious respiratory disease. Signs include moderate fever, pneumonia, and ulcers or blisters in the tongue. Severity of the disease varies depending on the strain of the virus present. It is a fairly mild, flu-like condition and rarely causes serious complications. Treatment consists of supportive and symptomatic therapy. As with rhinotracheitis, cats that recover from calicivirus become permanent carriers.
Chlamydia
Feline chlamydiosis (also known as feline pneumonitis) is a relatively mild chronic upper respiratory disease caused by bacteria. The main sign is conjunctivitis, an abnormal eye discharge due to inflammation of the conjunctiva, the membrane lining the inside of the eyelid. The infection can also cause nasal discharge, sneezing, and pneumonia. Left untreated, the infection tends to become chronic, lasting weeks or months. Treatment involves the use of topical antibiotics for several weeks.

Feline Leukemia
One of the most devastating feline diseases, Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) is a fatal, contagious disease that affects the immune system and can readily be transmitted between cats. FeLV is a retrovirus that is closely related to the human HIV virus that causes AIDS. Similar to its human counterpart, FeLV attacks the immune system of cats and exposes the animal to infectious diseases and cancer. It is harmless to humans, however, it is transmitted between cats through any type of bodily secretion. Cats in close contact, nursing kittens, and breeding animals are at risk. The disease is most prevalent in cats born in the wild.

Cats afflicted with FeLV may or may not exhibit signs. For this reason, all cats should be tested for the disease to ensure they are not carriers and to control the spread of the disease. Signs include fever, swollen glands, appetite loss, and respiratory problems. There is no cure for this disease.

Diarrhea/Vomiting
Diarrhea and vomiting with an animal is not uncommon. Animals suffer from these signs for a number of reasons. Diarrhea and vomiting could be linked to one of the following:
- Table scraps. A pet's intestinal system is not designed to handle the rich foods that we consume. Pets are the healthiest when fed bland, high-quality food only.
- Switching from a pet’s usual food to another brand or ingredient. Slowly introducing the new food into the existing food and adding larger portions of it daily while subtracting the old food can prevent this.
- Heatstroke
- Foreign object bodily ingestion. This can also include medicines, pesticides, and garbage.
- Bloat (a serious condition when the stomach turns around itself causing the blood supply to be cut off to the organs and resulting in life-threatening shock). This occurs mostly in large breed dogs, i.e. Great Danes, Mastiffs, etc.

At-home treatment without determining the actual cause can worsen the situation. Contact your veterinarian for instructions.

Fleas and Ticks
Anytime an animal leaves the comfort of our homes and enters the outside world, it is at risk of picking up either fleas or ticks. Fleas, ticks, and mites are ectoparasites, parasites that live on or burrow into their host’s skin. Parasites live at least part of their life cycles at the expense of host organisms. They can cause blood loss, skin irritation, allergies, and disease.

Talk to your veterinarian about flea and tick prevention. This will not prevent the parasites from getting on the pet, but will kill them shortly after they “hitch a ride.”
Burns
Signs include singed fur, blistering, swelling, and skin redness. Flush the burn immediately with large amounts of cool, running water and apply an ice pack wrapped in a light towel for 15-20 minutes. Dry chemicals should be gently brushed off and contact with water should be avoided. Seek veterinary care immediately.

Coughing
Anytime animals are housed together, it increases the chance of catching a cough or cold. If you see your pet coughing and it sounds like it is trying to bring up a hairball, or is making a deep raspy sound, call your veterinarian. Make sure the pet is kept isolated from other animals in the household, as it could be contagious. Kennel cough, if caught early, can be treated successfully by simply completing a course of oral antibiotics.

Choking
Signs include difficulty breathing, excessive pawing at the mouth, and blue lips and tongue.

Caution: The animal will likely be frantic and more likely to bite. If the pet is breathing, keep it calm and go to the veterinarian as quickly as possible. Check to see if a foreign object is visible. Carefully clear the airway by removing the object with pliers or tweezers. Do not push it farther down the throat. If it is lodged too deeply or the pet collapses, place your hands on both sides of the rib cage and apply firm, quick pressure. Or, place the animal on its side and strike the side of the rib cage firmly with the palm of your hand three or four times. Repeat this procedure until the object is dislodged or you arrive at the veterinarian's office.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus
Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) causes an infectious disease in domestic cats similar to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV infection) in humans, but cannot be transmitted to people. It attacks and weakens the body’s immune system, making the animal susceptible to infections and diseases that do not affect healthy cats. There is neither a cure nor a vaccine for FIV. Though eventually fatal, a FIV-positive cat can live for many years without any signs of illness. Signs include chronic non-responding infections, respiratory problems, appetite loss, persistent diarrhea, and severe oral infections.

Rabies
Rabies is a viral disease that affects the central nervous system, causing encephalitis and ultimately death of mammals including people. Rabies is transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. Signs vary depending on the stage of the disease. Signs may include altered disposition, loss of appetite, fever, restlessness, outbursts of aggression, convulsions, and paralysis. Once the signs appear the disease is not treatable and always fatal.

All dogs and cats should be vaccinated yearly. Make sure you discuss a vaccination schedule with your veterinarian.
First Aid

When your pet has a medical emergency, being prepared is very important. Be sure you know how your veterinarian handles emergencies. Some veterinarians are always on call and others use an emergency hospital after hours. The following information is intended to give you an idea of some medical issues you may encounter with pets. This is not a complete listing of ailments, but it does cover the most frequently seen problems with animals. This booklet offers information on what you should do if you encounter any of the following conditions. However, this booklet is not intended to substitute care from a licensed veterinarian. **It is important to follow-up with your veterinarian if any of these conditions or others not listed occur.**

Bites
If your pet is bitten by another animal or wildlife, approach carefully and muzzle the animal. Wear gloves if possible. Check the wound for debris and clean it with saline, balanced electrolyte solution, or water. Wrap the wound to keep it clean. Apply pressure to stop the bleeding, but do not use a tourniquet. Seek veterinary care immediately.

Bleeding
Apply firm, **direct pressure** for at least 10 minutes until the bleeding stops. Avoid cutting off circulation. Seek veterinary care immediately.

Blood in urine
Animals can pass blood in their urine for several different reasons. The most common reasons for blood in the urine is either a urinary infection, which is also noted by the animal appearing to want to urinate frequently with little or no urine coming out, or bladder stones being present. Both of these conditions are serious and require veterinary care.

Blood in stool
When blood is passed in the stool, it is usually as a result of stress, parasites, excessive straining to defecate, or trauma to the surrounding tissue. If red blood is noted, it means that the bleeding has occurred somewhere past the digestive system (rectum). If black bloody stool is noted, it means that the bleeding has most likely occurred in the small intestines. Bleeding in the stomach will often result in vomiting brown or black fluids that resemble coffee grounds. If this occurs, schedule a veterinary exam for your pet.

Breathing stops
Check to see if the animal is choking on a foreign object. If possible, remove any visible object, being careful not to push the object further down. Place your pet on a firm surface with its left side up and listen for a pulse in the area where the elbow touches the chest. If the animal has a pulse but is not breathing, close the animal's mouth and breathe **directly into its nose** until the chest expands. Repeat 12 to 15 times per minute.

If there is no pulse, apply **heart compressions**. The heart is located in the lower half of the chest, behind the elbow of the front left leg. Place one hand below the heart to support the chest and the other hand over the heart. Compress gently. In small animals, compress the heart with the thumb and forefingers of one hand. Alternate between one breath and 10 compressions. Seek veterinary care immediately.

Please note: Successful resuscitation is rare, even in the hands of veterinary health professionals. Success is slightly higher in cases of drowning and electrical shock.