

# **Pet First Aid**

## **By Crista DeJoia, DVM**

Summer is a great time to get outside and have fun with our pets, but owners must take some precautions and learn basic first aid to ensure that our furry friends stay out of harm's way.

You may be tempted to take your pet in the car while you travel or do errands. Pets are extremely vulnerable to heat stroke, brain damage, and even death if left unattended in a hot car. Be safe and leave your pet at home if the situation doesn't permit them to get out of the heat.

Older dogs, short-nosed dogs and dogs with thick coats need to be exercised during the morning and evening hours to avoid heat stroke. Pets suffering from heat stroke may pant heavily, have a rapid pulse, staggering gait, and deep red or purple tongue. Move the animal into the shade and apply cool (not cold) water over his body to gradually lower his body temperature. Let him drink small amounts of water or ice cubes and get veterinary attention.

Skin and paw lacerations are common occurrences when playing outside. Small and superficial cuts will heal with simple clean water rinsing and the application of antibiotic ointment three times a day. Deeper lacerations can be cleaned with water and bandaged until you can see your veterinarian. Puncture wounds (especially cat bites) need to be treated with caution, as they can readily turn into an abscess. The wound should be flushed with water and watched very closely for swelling or redness indicating a deeper infection, and examined by a vet if these occur.

Insect bites and stings are best treated with a cool compress over the area to help relieve swelling, and antihistamines on the advice of your veterinarian. A tick on your animal is best removed by grasping it as close to the skin as possible with a pair of tweezers and gently pulling. If your pet is struck by a snake, keep him as calm as possible and immobilize him (i.e. carry him to the car). Do not tourniquet or manipulate the bitten area. Get veterinary attention as soon as possible.

Animals are at an increased risk of being hit by a vehicle during summer months. Carefully assess the animal's breathing and pulse, and then look for any areas of trauma. If there is bleeding, apply pressure to the area with a clean cloth. Stabilize any obvious fractures as best you can, and head to the animal hospital.

Preparation is an important part of handling any emergency. Make a list of important phone numbers including your vet, the emergency number for your vet, and local poison control. A pet first aid kit is useful for your home and car; a checklist of suggested items can be found for both dogs and cats at [www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com).

Have a safe summer!

