



FEATURE

Canine First Aid: *Vehicle Trauma*

A traumatic injury, for the purposes of this article, refers to physical injuries sustained by a dog, and the severity of those injuries, after being hit by a vehicle.

Anything motorised, and some man-powered vehicles are high risk for a dog who is off leash on the roads, pathways or on tracks. For example:

- Motor Vehicle
- All-terrain Vehicle (ATV)
- Motorbikes, Scooters
- Motorised Skateboards and Bicycles

It's often said that the greater the speed the more severe the injury; however, where dogs, as with children are concerned, a dog can just as easily die if hit or travelled over at a slow walking speed.

A dog who is hit by a moving vehicle will endure potentially life threatening injuries; by way of:

- Blunt force trauma;
- Fall from height; or
- A penetrating / embedded object

Risk of Injury

Your dog is at risk of injury if he/she:

- Is able to get off their leash while out walking
- Escapes the backyard and wanders the neighbourhood
- Manages to run out the front door and onto a busy road
- Has a habit of chasing cars
- Walks too close to the edge of the road
- Gets too far ahead of you when crossing the road
- Sleeps on the driveway of your home
- Has free access to play or walk on driveway and walks behind a reversing car

Safety Precautions

Some precautions you could consider:

- Ensure the collar or harness fits securely
- Train dog not to chew through leash, or put a barrier on the leash
- Make sure fences are high enough to prevent dog from jumping over and in good condition
- Put guards below fence line to stop dog from digging under and escaping
- Place dog on leash before answering the front door if your dog is at risk of running out the door
- Keep dog on short leash when walking on footpaths if close to road side.
- Walk dog next to you when crossing the road
- Either block dog from driveway or take a routine walk around the car before ever pulling out of the driveway
- Only allow your dog to walk off leash in designated off leash zones

Signs & Symptoms

It is your job as a dog owner to provide immediate medical attention; your quick action may not only help reduce your dog's pain and suffering, but it could also mean the difference between life and death. You may see the following signs and symptoms on a dog who has been in a vehicle accident:

- Head trauma
- Disorientated, confused





FEATURE

- Glazed eyes or may be an inability to focus
- Stumbling or falling over, lameness
- Spinal injury / paralysis
- Severe bleeding from anywhere on the body; open wounds, lacerations
- Eye injury / proptosis (eye protrudes from socket)
- Fractured legs / long bone fractures (closed and open)
- De-gloving of limb, toes, (section of skin torn off)
- Reluctance to rise and move about
- Breathing difficulties / respiratory failure
- Gums appear pale or blue
- Chest wound / flail chest
- Vomiting up blood
- Abdominal wound
- Embedded object
- Black diarrhoea (indicates blood in faeces)
- Shock
- Dog experiences anxiety, depression and/or aggression
- Collapse, unconscious, cardiac arrest

Never remove an embedded object; Secure in place using donut bandage technique.

Action

1. Undertake Primary Assessment DRSABC.

- a. Check for Dangers – a danger may be that your dog will become aggressive towards you (warning: never put a muzzle on a dog who has breathing difficulties); it may be too dangerous.
- b. Is your dog responding to your voice or your touch? If not your dog may be unconscious.
- c. Send for help; if there is someone else in the house get them to do things like get the first aid kit, help carry dog, prepare the car and call the Vet. They may also be able to help you restrain your dog or help manage the wounds.
- d. Check the airway for vomit in the mouth, remove if there is; look to see if the airway is intact or swollen.
- e. Check the breathing (respirations) feel / watch the rise and fall of the chest – start artificial respiration if not breathing.
- f. Check circulation (pulse) – start CPR if no pulse.

2. Manage potential injuries

- a. Treat shock
- b. Treat spinal injury
- c. Treat life-threatening bleeding
- d. Treat open wounds
- e. Treat eye injury / proptosis
- f. Treat for fractures
- g. Treat penetrating injuries (never remove an imbedded object)

3. Calm your dog; restrict pet's movement; wrap in warm blanket

DON'T place dog on injured side If you have a driver:

- If your dog stops breathing, begin artificial respiration on the way to the vet surgery
- If your dog's heart stops beating, begin CPR on the way to the vet surgery.

Reference: Fursafe Canine Emergency First Aid Guide (see image above)

Manual of Trauma Management in the dog and cat Canine Emergency dog first aid guide

