

CPR Can Save A Pet's Life

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, can be used to treat an animal that has stopped breathing or has no heartbeat. It involves mouth-to-nose resuscitation and chest compressions. If you have confirmed that your pet has no heartbeat or the breathing has stopped, have someone call your veterinarian or the local emergency clinic for guidance while you begin rescue efforts.

At the veterinary clinic, they have important aids for resuscitation such as adrenalin, oxygen, intravenous fluids, breathing stimulants, and windpipe intubation to maximize effectiveness of CPR, but until you get there, the basic first aid techniques described below may save a pet's life.

CPR can be broken down into three steps, which are called the ABC's of CPR: Airway, Breathing, and Circulation. It is very important that CPR be performed in this order. If an animal is unconscious and motionless, the first step is to establish whether the animal has an open airway. Open the mouth, pull out the tongue, and examine the throat. In long-nosed breeds of dogs, a small flashlight may be needed to visualize the throat area. Use your finger to check for and remove any foreign material from the mouth.

To protect fingers in case the pet starts to arouse during the examination, make sure the fingers are never placed in the path of the large teeth at all times. If the animal is conscious, one must not put the fingers in the mouth at all because the pet may bite very hard due to reflex. The second step is to check for breathing. If the animal is not breathing, respiratory resuscitation should begin. For medium-to-large-sized animals, holding the muzzle closed with your hands should seal the mouth, providing mouth-to-nose resuscitation. For cats and very small dogs, your mouth will seal the pet's mouth when you perform CPR, though commonly, mouth-to-nose resuscitation is used for this size of pet also.

Placing your mouth over the animal's nose and exhaling directly into the nostrils begins resuscitation. Do not overinflate the chest or lung damage may occur. After four to five quick breaths, the breathing should be checked again. If the animal does not start breathing after 10-15 minutes, it is not likely to revive. Small dogs and cats require 20 to 30 breaths per minute, and medium-to-large dogs require 20 breaths per minute. To check whether enough air is being provided (or too much), watch the movement of the chest wall as you provide air. The chest wall should move up and out as if a large normal deep breath is occurring. If the wall moves very high, you are over-inflating the lungs, and a smaller, less vigorous breath should be used. If the chest wall does not move at all, it is possible that a blockage of the windpipe is present.

If there is no heartbeat present, chest compressions should be performed as well. For small dogs, the pet should be lying on its right side. The palm of one hand should be placed over the ribs at the point where the elbows would touch the chest if he was standing, while the other hand is placed beneath the right chest wall.

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The chest should be compressed at the rate of five compressions followed by one breath. If there are two people present, one person can perform the breathing, while the other compresses the chest at a rate of three compressions for each breath, then checks for a pulse in the femoral artery (running up the inside of the leg and felt near the junction of leg and body wall).

For medium-to-large dogs, the hands must be cupped over each other and the arms kept straight and elbows locked and the person needs to place their body squarely over their hands in order to get sufficient power to compress the chest properly. The hands should be placed at the point where the left elbow meets the chest. The chest must be compressed at the rate of five compressions followed by one breath. If there are two people present, one person can perform the breathing, while the other compresses the chest at a rate of two to three compressions for each breath, then checks for a pulse. A folded towel placed under the chest will help to keep the pet from shifting during the application of pressure.

Cats should be placed on their side, and one hand should be placed over the backbone near the shoulder blades, while the other hand is cupped around the underside of the chest where, if the cat was standing, the elbows would be. Flat fingers on the underside, and flat thumb applied on the upper side are applied over this region of the heart.

Pulses can be checked by placing a finger over the mid portion of the inside rear limb about half way between the body wall and the stifle, or knee joint. The femoral artery lies within a trough in the muscles here. A veterinarian can teach this during a routine annual examination. It is best to practice on a healthy, awake pet.

If done correctly, CPR can save a pet's life. However, pet owners should be aware that even if performed by an experienced veterinarian, CPR is not always successful. However, this should not deter anyone from trying it in an emergency situation. To learn more about CPR, ask your veterinarian.

For more animal health information, visit the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association's website for pet owners www.animalhealthcare.ca