



HIT BY CAR (HBC) AND OTHER ACUTE TRAUMA

Any pet that is hit by an automobile (or sustains any kind of serious trauma—falling from a height, being kicked by a horse, etc.) should be examined immediately by a veterinarian, since many life-threatening, internal injuries may not be apparent superficially. If your pet has been hit by a car, its injuries may range from minor to life threatening.

The trauma can affect your pet's entire body, so any animal that has been hit by a car needs to be examined by a veterinarian so that the extent and severity of its injuries may be determined. Animals that have been hit by a car may exhibit obvious signs of trauma such as bleeding from lacerations or abrasions, bone fractures, and signs of shock. Even though the animal may have only minimal external injuries, the stress of the accident can produce signs of deep shock. Shock is the loss of effective circulating blood volume, causing low tissue perfusion and inadequate oxygen delivery to meet the demands of the tissues and organs.

Panting, cool extremities, pale gums, and a depressed attitude are some common signs associated with shock in animals. **SHOCK ALONE, IF NOT TREATED, CAN CAUSE DEATH!** Treatment for shock may consist of intravenous fluids, oxygen, and corticosteroids. Radiographs (xrays) may be taken to determine the extent of chest trauma or of suspected bone fractures. Chest trauma can be deadly.

It is unlikely that a fracture by itself will be life-threatening. Initially, fractures may be splinted and lacerations may be bandaged. Due to the risk of anesthesia in any patient with chest or head trauma, any surgeries for non-life-threatening problems (fractures, lacerations, etc.) must be delayed until the pet has been stabilized.

Whether or not your pet has obvious injuries, there are a number of “hidden” injuries that can be present initially or which can develop over time. One of the more common internal injuries is trauma to the chest and lungs. The force of the impact with the automobile or the ground can result in fractured ribs, bruised or bleeding lungs, and/or air leakage from the lungs into the surrounding chest cavity (pneumothorax). All of these injuries can cause difficulty breathing, signs of which may be: blue gums, panting or very labored breathing, and collapse. If not treated, chest trauma can quickly cause death. The heart may also be bruised and injured by the impact, and abnormal heart beats (arrhythmias) may occur. These arrhythmias may take 3-5 days to develop and can cause sudden death.

Trauma to the chest can also cause a diaphragmatic hernia, which is a tear in the muscle wall separating the chest and abdomen. When this muscle wall is torn, the abdominal contents (liver, stomach, and intestines) can enter the chest and compress the lungs, resulting in breathing difficulty. Chest radiographs will often be necessary to determine the extent of the chest injuries and, if needed, your pet will be provided with oxygen to help it breathe more easily.

Other internal injuries may include abdominal bleeding, which also can be life-threatening. The urinary bladder may also be damaged or ruptured by the impact. If the bladder is ruptured, urine will leak into the abdomen and cause severe complications, and ultimately, death if not repaired. Exploratory surgery may be required to stop any abdominal bleeding or to repair a ruptured bladder. A blood transfusion may be necessary if blood loss is severe.

Head and spinal trauma may also result from the accident. Symptoms of head trauma can include uneven pupils, unconsciousness, or bleeding from the nose, mouth, or ears. Spinal trauma can result in paralysis of the front/and or rear legs, a “hunched” back stance, or breathing difficulties. Trauma to the nervous system can worsen after the initial injury due to progressive swelling. To minimize the damage, your pet needs to be examined immediately.

When Your Pet Goes Home from the Hospital:

- 1) Keep it quiet and confined indoors for at least 3 days. Limit running, jumping, or playing.
- 2) Make sure your pet is eating and drinking normally and going to the bathroom normally. If your pet is having difficulty urinating or defecating or is unable to urinate or defecate, it should be rechecked immediately by your veterinarian. Watch for blood in the urine.
- 3) Monitor for breathing difficulty, lameness, or any signs of bleeding. These injuries may not be apparent initially.
- 4) Do not give any medication which has not been prescribed or recommended by your veterinarian. Over-the-counter pain relievers such as aspirin, ibuprofen, acetaminophen, naproxen, and other similar medications may cause complications.
- 5) Have your pet rechecked immediately if any symptoms, particularly breathing difficulty or bleeding, persist or worsen.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve you!