Emergency! What should I do?

Our cats’ health is important to us, and we dedicate ourselves to keeping them not only fit and healthy, but also making sure that they are safe. Sometimes, no matter how much we try to protect them, accidents will happen, so knowing what to do in such situations can have a big impact on the outcome.

Emergencies
An emergency is life-threatening situation requiring immediate action. Examples include road traffic accidents (RTAs), poisonings, sudden collapse, uncontrollable bleeding and breathing difficulties.

1. ACT QUICKLY
In an emergency, time is of the essence, so if your cat is involved in an accident, or suddenly becomes very ill, veterinary advice should be sought immediately. Before phoning your vet, check the following:

a. Danger
If your cat is ill or injured, or if you come across an injured cat, such as one which has been hit by a car, then safety is paramount. First make sure it is safe for you to approach the cat. If it is not, then phone the emergency services as it is possible that the situation is a risk to human life. If it is safe to approach, do so carefully whilst assessing the surroundings – is there any danger to the cat? If so, can this be removed? It is preferable to remove any danger away from the cat, but if this is not possible then you will need to move the cat.

b. Rapid assessment
Understand the situation by doing a rapid, primary survey of the cat – this should take no longer than 30-60 seconds.

- Is the cat breathing? Look for movement of the chest
- Is the cat conscious? Look for any signs of movement

Once you have a handle on the situation, phone your veterinary clinic.

2. CALL YOUR VET
Make sure you always have access to your veterinary clinic’s contact number – programme it into your mobile phone should you need it when you are out and about. Always phone your vet before taking your cat to the clinic – even in an emergency. They will be able to give you advice as well as prepare for your arrival, meaning treatment can be started much quicker. When speaking to your vet, try to remain calm and listen carefully to what they say and any questions they ask. If you saw your cat eating something it shouldn’t have before it became ill, collect a sample of the substance and any packaging, and take it with you to the vet.

3. FIRST AID
In an emergency situation, providing first aid treatment should never delay the journey to the veterinary practice. As mentioned earlier, time is of the essence and the most important thing is to get to a vet fast. Unless your vet has given you instructions to perform first aid, please do not waste precious time trying to be a hero.

4. MOVING/TRANSPORTING
It will always be in your cat’s best interest to be taken to the veterinary clinic rather than requesting a home visit. This not only saves times, but also means that your cat will receive the correct treatment quicker as emergency treatments/procedures cannot be carried out in the home environment.

If you cat is at home and has suddenly become ill or injured, take it in its carrier to the clinic. If you come across an injured cat, then you will need to improvise with what you have available.

Injured/ill cats are usually very distressed and scared.
so a gentle but firm approach is required. Again, safety is important for both you and the cat, neither of you want to become injured in the process! Use a large towel/blanket/coat etc, to scoop the cat up – don’t be afraid of hurting the cat, it is unlikely that you will make any injuries worse. Wrap the cat up in the towel/blanket, including covering its head. This gently restrains the cat so it cannot escape, protects you from claws and teeth and keeps the cat as calm as possible for the journey.

5. AT THE VET
Expect your vet to take your cat from you for immediate treatment when you arrive at the clinic. You will need to wait while they assess your cat and provide emergency treatment – this can take some time, so please be patient, they will be doing everything they can for your cat.

Urgent situations
An illness or injury is classed as ‘urgent’ when there is not an immediate risk to life, but if left untreated it could become an emergency. In these situations, there is a little more time to play with, so first aid measures can be carried out at home until you can see the vet (usually the same day). Urgent situations include:

• **Vomiting** – repeated vomiting can be a sign of an underlying medical condition and so veterinary advice should be sought. Keep your cat in until you can attend an appointment and keep a log of how often it vomits. Make sure fresh water is available, but do not offer any food. If there is a sudden change in your cat’s condition, phone the clinic straight away.

• **Wounds** – any injuries should be looked at by your vet, even if they aren’t bleeding and appear to be clean, as they are likely to require treatment. If possible, apply a light dressing to protect the area until it can be checked by the vet. Puncture wounds (eg, cat or dog bite) should not be bandaged as they are highly likely to be infected. Any wounds on the chest or abdomen should be checked out ASAP by your vet – they may be deeper than they appear. Do not remove any foreign bodies (eg, sticks) from wounds as this can cause more damage.

• **Difficulty urinating** – if you notice that your cat is having trouble urinating (using the litter tray a lot, but producing little or no urine) then call your vet for an appointment. Keep your cat in and monitor it closely – any deterioration in the cat’s condition makes this situation an emergency as it may have a blockage. This is more commonly seen in male cats than females, but will always require veterinary attention.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR CAT’S HEALTH AT ALL, THEN PLEASE CONTACT YOUR VETERINARY PRACTICE FOR ADVICE.**