

Caring for Your Pets During Natural Disasters

Megan Brashear, BS, CVT, VTS (ECC)

Dear Valued Pet Owner,

When a natural disaster strikes, our news feeds are filled with heartbreaking stories of loss. The human toll is almost incomprehensible, but we also think of the four-legged family members displaced and in danger. Injured and sick pets may not receive immediate medical care due to transportation difficulties, damage sustained to veterinary hospitals, and limits on the personnel available to help during large natural disasters.

The following are first aid tips for dogs and cats until veterinary care is possible:

- Flood waters bring the possibility of toxins dangerous to humans and pets. If at all possible, do not allow pets to drink or swim in flood waters
- Be aware of any sharp objects brought into your area by flood waters. Sharp metal and wood hiding in murky water can cause significant injury
- Do not tie up dogs or cats to fences or stationary objects in the house as this may cause them to hurt themselves or be trapped in harm's way
- Provide fresh or boiled water if possible for drinking water. Cats should drink 1 cup of water per day; dogs should drink 1-2 cups of water per 10 pounds of body weight per day
- If your pet's regular diet is not available, feed them bland food such as rice or potatoes and mix in [fruit, vegetables](#), or protein as it is available. This diet is not sustainable long term but will help in the short term until help is available
- If the pet is experiencing vomiting or diarrhea, this is common due to stress, diet change, or ingestion of contaminated water. If the pet is vomiting, allow them 4-6 hours with no food or water, then slowly reintroduce food and water in small amounts. If the vomiting does not return, offer small, frequent meals. If the animal is having diarrhea, ensure they have a source of clean water and encourage them to continue eating, so they do not become dehydrated
- Allow animals some space if they need it. Our pets get stressed just like us and need a safe place. If possible, create an area where dogs and cats can be left alone and feel protected. This safe space can be in a crate or small room
- If an animal sustains a wound, pour clean water over the wounded area to superficially clean surface debris; it is painful to the pet to scrub wounds. If you are unable to seek immediate medical care, you can place some water soluble lubricant over the wound

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(which keeps tissues moist and will aid in cleaning the wound later). Then cover the wound with a non-stick dressing followed by a towel, saran wrap, a sock, or bandage material to prevent further contamination

If your pet is acting sick or has injuries, pet owners can monitor vital signs to help them determine if emergency care is needed. Owners can track their pet's vital signs and look for trends or changes that alert them to a worsening situation.

- **HEART RATE: 80-140 beats/min dogs; 140-200 beats/min cats**
 - You can feel for the pet's heart beat through their chest or by feeling for a femoral pulse on the inside of their back leg. Fear, pain, dehydration, difficulty breathing, and blood loss can all cause an elevated heart rate. If your pet has a sustained heart rate higher than 160 beats per minute in a dog or 220 beats per minute in a cat, medical care may be required
- **BREATHING RATE: 12-36 breaths/min dogs and cats**
 - Also look at how much effort it takes for the animal to breathe. Listen for any noise with breathing. Watch for any posturing to breathe easier. If your pet is in respiratory distress keep them calm and comfortable until medical help is available
- **GUM COLOR:**
 - Lift the animal's lip to see their gum color - pink is normal. Low blood pressure or blood loss can lead to pale or white gums. Blue/gray/lavender gums mean low oxygen
- **CAPILLARY REFILL TIME:**
 - Press lightly on the gums or inside of the lip. The tissue will turn white, followed by a return to color within one to two seconds. If the return to color takes longer than two seconds, the animal may be dehydrated, have low blood pressure, or low body temperature

Remember that if you are evacuating with your pet to bring proof of vaccines and a photo of you and your pet together in the event you are separated. Animals bring us great joy and comfort in times of sorrow, and we want yours to remain healthy and happy and with their family.

Sincerely,

The Team at [INSERT PRACTICE NAME]