Contact Your Veterinarian When Your Small Pet Shows These Signs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

The following information may help you decide which conditions are absolute emergencies, and which ones may let you take a "wait and see" attitude. Small pets, such as hamsters, mice, rats, gerbils, guinea pigs, chinchillas, sugar gliders, and hedgehogs with their evolutionary history of being prey animals, will often mask signs of illness. By the time you notice something is wrong, the condition could be very severe. If your small pet is sick or injured and you are unsure of the severity of the condition, it is always best to err on the side of caution, and contact your veterinarian (or emergency clinic) right away.

Contact your veterinarian immediately if your small pet:

Has signs of heart or respiratory disease including:

- No pulse or heart beat
- No breathing or labored breathing, especially if accompanied by sneezing and eye/nose discharge
- Bluish or white gums or tongue
- A near drowning

Has had trauma including:

- A broken bone, or a cut that exposes a bone
- Bleeding that cannot be stopped
- An eye injury, the eye is out of the socket, or appears enlarged or protruding
- A fight, especially if it was with a cat or a wild, or unvaccinated animal
- Being hit by a moving object
- Puncture wounds to the abdomen or chest
- Any trauma to the head
- A bite from a snake, scorpion, or poisonous spider
- A broken tooth
- A severe laceration, or an incision that has opened and the skin is gaping
- Falling or jumping from a height of over 2 feet
- Mishandling (e.g., squeezed by a child)

Has had heat or cold related injuries including:

- Chewing on an electrical cord and receiving a shock or burn
- Burns or inhaled smoke
- Heat stroke or a fever over 105°F (normal is less than 102.5°F)
- Has frostbite or hypothermia

Has signs of gastrointestinal distress including:

- Straining continually, but unable to produce feces
- Choking
- Bloat (abdomen is enlarged and sounds hollow)
- Swallowing a foreign body (e.g., toy, needle and thread)
- Diarrhea with blood, a green or black color, mucous, straining, a foul smell, or that is uncontrolled; especially if the animal appears ill (coat puffed up)
- Black, tarry stool
- A protruded rectum or bleeding from the rectum
- Bleeding from the mouth
- An overdose of medication or suspected poisoning

Has signs of nervous system or muscular disease including:

- Extreme lethargy or depression, unconsciousness, collapse, or coma
- Seizures
- A head tilt, nystagmus (eyes move rapidly from side to side), staggering, walking in circles, knuckling over (walking on the top of the foot), unable to use hind limbs, or other problems moving
- Severe or continuous pain
- Sudden inability to bear weight on one or more limbs

Has signs of urinary or reproductive problems including:

- Difficulty giving birth: no offspring after 15 minutes of active straining; weak or infrequent contractions once labor has started; crying or licking the vulva area excessively; abnormal bleeding or vaginal discharge; weakness

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

- Straining continually but unable to pass urine, or the urine has blood in it
- Crying or squeaking while trying to urinate
- Bleeding from the urinary or genital area

Call your veterinarian the same day if your small pet:

Has signs of heart or respiratory disease including:

- Increased rate of breathing, sneezing, coughing, or wheezing
- Runny nose or eyes

Has signs related to digestion or food and water consumption including:

- Not eating or drinking for 8 hours, or having difficulty eating
- Diarrhea for more than 24 hours and acts depressed
- Drinking water excessively, unrelated to activity or environmental temperature
- A soft stool, but there is no pain, blood, fetid odor, green or black color, mucous, or straining

Has signs of nervous system or muscular disease including:

- Sudden change in behavior
- Lethargy, depression, sleeping more than usual, unwillingness to play or exercise
- Crying when touched or picked up
- Cloudy eyes, squinting, or appears to be unable to see
- Sudden, severe lameness
- Swollen joints (a sign of scurvy)

Has signs of urinary or reproductive problems including:

- A retained afterbirth for over 8 hours
- A female who is pregnant or nursing her young and develops a red, swollen, or painful breast
- A male with swollen testicles or scrotum

Has signs associated with the skin including:

- A rash, excessive shedding, excessive head shaking, or persistent scratching or chewing at spots on the body
- Abnormal lumps or bumps that are painful, red, and/or hot to the touch
- Maggots
- A nosebleed for no apparent reason, bruising easily, or tiny red dots on the skin

Call your veterinarian in 24 hours if your small pet has signs including:

Has signs related to digestion or food and water consumption including:

- Foul breath
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Drooling

Has signs of nervous system or muscular disease including:

- Lameness for more than 24 hours

Has signs associated with the skin including:

- Moderate itching or an unpleasant odor from the coat
- A discharge from the ear or other body opening

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*