# Reptile and Amphibian Emergencies: Why and When to Contact Your Veterinarian

*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. If your herp 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 herp:

Has signs of heart or respiratory disease including:

- No heart beat
- No breathing or severe difficulty breathing, especially if accompanied by eye/nose discharge
- Bluish or white gums or tongue
- A near drowning

Has had trauma including:

- A broken shell, 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 or bite wounds
- Any trauma to the head
- 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)
- Broken or torn claws, digits, or tails

Has had heat or cold related injuries including:

- Biting on an electrical cord and receiving a shock or burn
- Burns or inhaled smoke
- Heat stroke
- Hypothermia

Has signs of gastrointestinal, urinary, or reproductive distress including:

- Straining continually, but unable to produce feces or urates
- Choking
- Bloat (abdomen is enlarged and sounds hollow)
- Swallowing a foreign body (e.g., cage decoration)
- Feces or urates with an unusual color, consistency, or a foul smell
- A prolapse or eversion at the cloaca or bleeding from the cloaca
- Difficulty giving birth or producing an egg
- 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, difficulty rising or righting itself, unable to use hind limbs, lying upside down, or other problems moving
- Severe or continuous pain
- Sudden inability to bear weight on one or more limbs

Call your veterinarian the same day if your herp:

Has signs of heart or respiratory disease including:

- Some difficulty breathing, shallow breathing at a faster rate (unassociated with physical exercise or mental temperature)
- Discharge from nose or eyes



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

- Not eating a meal and acting depressed
- Drinking water excessively
- Changes in the frequency of passing feces or urates
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- An increase in the frequency of gaping
- Changes in saliva, crusts around the mouth, or change in color of the inside of the mouth

Has changes in behavior, or signs of nervous system or muscular disease including:

- Sudden change in behavior e.g., not coming out of hide box, or active at unusual times
- Lethargy, depression, sleeping more than usual, unwillingness to move
- Basking more or less often
- Soaking more or less often
- Tongue-flicking more or less often
- Flinching when touched or picked up
- Cloudy eyes, squinting, or appears to be unable to see
- Lameness for over 24 hours
- Loss of muscle tone
- Swollen joints or jaw

Has signs associated with the skin including:

- Abnormal shedding, retained eye spectacles, rubbing or scratching areas on the body, or head-banging
- Abnormal lumps, bumps, or red areas
- Scabs or abrasions
- Ticks or mites
- Abnormal color to skin or darkening of toes or tail



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