Bird Emergencies: Contact Your Veterinarian When Your Bird 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. If your bird 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 bird:

Has signs of heart or respiratory disease including:

- No heart beat
- No breathing or difficulty breathing (open mouth breathing, tail bobbing while breathing)
- Wheezing or clicking sounds when breathing
- A near drowning
- Any breathing abnormality after an exposure to overheated teflon, aerosol spray, or other irritant to the respiratory system

Has had trauma including:

- A broken bone, or a cut that exposes a bone
- Bleeding that cannot be stopped (e.g., from blood feather, nail, or beak)
- An eye injury or the eye appears enlarged or protruding
- An attack by an animal
- Being hit by a moving object
- Puncture wounds
- Any trauma to the head
- Flying into a window or other object
- A severe laceration, or an incision that has opened and the skin is gaping
- Mishandling (e.g., squeezed by a child)

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 (panting, holding wings out away from the body)
- Hypothermia

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

- Straining continually, but unable to produce feces or urates
- Choking
- Swallowing a foreign body (e.g., toy, cage decoration)
- Crop burn from feeding items that were too warm
- Any condition that makes it difficult to eat or manipulate food (injury to the beak, or in the case of parrots, a foot)
- A prolapse or eversion at the vent or bleeding from the vent
- Egg binding - straining and having difficulty producing an egg
- An overdose of medication or suspected poisoning

Has signs of general illness or nervous system or muscular disease including:

- Extreme weakness, lethargy or depression, unconsciousness, collapse, or coma
- Seizures (flapping wings while lying in the bottom of the cage)
- A head tilt, nystagmus (eyes move rapidly from side to side), staggering, walking in circles, difficulty sitting on a perch, or other problems moving
- Severe or continuous pain
- Sudden inability to bear weight on a leg or use a wing
- Swollen or injured foot due to a leg band problem

Call your veterinarian within eight hours if your bird:

Has signs of heart or respiratory disease including:

- Sneezing
- Discharge from nose or eyes

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

- An increased or decreased appetite or thirst
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Discharge or crusts around the mouth, or change in color of the inside of the mouth
- Vomiting, regurgitation, or swelling of the crop area
- Changes in the number, color, or consistency of the droppings
- An unusual smell to the droppings

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

- Sitting fluffed up, huddled, or at the bottom of the cage
- A sudden change in behavior, e.g., changes in vocalizations
- Cloudy eyes, squinting, or appears to be unable to see
- Swollen joints or feet
- Lameness or favoring a leg
- Crusting or discoloration of the feet
- A drooped or elevated wing

Has signs associated with the skin including:

- Abnormal lumps, bumps, or red areas
- Scabs or abrasions
- Ticks or mites
- Abnormal color to skin or darkening of toes
- Wet, stained, or matted feathers
- Continual picking at feathers or body

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