



## **CPR For Canines**

by Becki Jo Wolkenheim

### **An Ounce of Prevention**

Puppies of all breeds are probably most at risk for life-threatening accidents because of their perpetual curiosity. They have not yet had enough experience to know that certain actions can be harmful to them. Being prepared for life-threatening emergencies is a necessary facet of dog ownership; preventing accidents that result in the need for emergency action is the first step toward preparedness.

"Puppy proofing" a home or kennel is really not as difficult as it sounds. It merely means being alert for known sources of danger (poisons, electrical cords, splintery bones), and removing them from the environment. "Puppy proofing" also means being aware of potential environmental dangers (heat stress, improper use of choke collars, uncrated transportation) and taking appropriate precautions against them.

Dogs depend upon their owners to provide a safe environment in which to live. Even with the most careful stewardship of a dog or puppy, however, life-threatening emergencies can and will occur. Some of the most critical of all emergencies can be dealt with through a knowledge of CPR techniques. A word of caution is in order at this point: CPR *practice* should be done *only* on manikins designed for that purpose. *Chest compression, when not needed, can do harm.*

### **CPR**

CPR means:

Cardio - Heart

Pulmonary - Breathing

Resuscitation - To restore heartbeat and or breathing

The sequence of actions to be taken may be remembered by the letters A, B, and C.

A      Airway

B      Breathing

C      Circulation

When there is blockage of the airway, the dog is no longer able to breathe. The heart and lungs work together to keep the dog alive, and the heart needs oxygen in order to work. If the heart does not get oxygen through the lungs, from breathing, it will stop beating.

In an emergency, you may find your dog unconscious; quickly determine whether or not you are able to rouse your dog. If not, the first step is to *assess the airway*



(A = Airway). Look for chest or belly movement. Listen for gentle sounds of breathing. Feel for air moving through nose or mouth. If still in doubt, attempt Rescue Breathing (B = Breathing). Keep the dog's tongue pulled forward and to the side. Close the dog's mouth as well as possible, cupping your hands around the muzzle to form an airtight seal. Form an airtight seal with your mouth over the dog's nose and blow into the nostrils, while closely watching the dog's chest and belly. As you give the first four quick breaths, you should see chest and belly movement coinciding with those breaths. As you remove your mouth from the dog's nose, you should feel air flowing out of the dog's nose. If the airway is blocked, you will feel as though you are trying to blow up a balloon which has a knot tied in it. If this is the case, you will deal with it as a choking emergency.

If a dog is conscious and choking, you may see: excess saliva, gulping and gasping for air, vigorous and anxious pawing at mouth and throat, bluish or grey color of mouth and tongue.

When you suspect choking, inspect the dog's mouth for foreign objects, and remove them if possible. However, do not blindly explore with your fingers; this may push a foreign object further into the dog's throat, making it even more difficult to dislodge. Position the dog on his right side on a firm surface, with its head lower than the level of the rest of the body, if at all possible. First, give the dog four blows to the back with the flat of the hand. (Use fingers for small dogs.) Position hands at the middle of the belly, just below the rib cage. Press with a quick, upward thrust; repeat this four times. This maneuver exerts pressure on the diaphragm, which then forces any air remaining in the lungs up and out of the airway. This, in turn, also forces out the foreign object. Repeat the entire cycle: Attempt to breathe for the dog; four back blows; four abdominal thrusts until you are successful in clearing the airway.

Once the airway is opened, the dog may begin breathing by himself. If this happens, you may need only to transport the dog to a veterinarian as quickly as possible. If the dog is not breathing, begin Rescue Breathing, as described earlier in the article. Breathe for the dog one time every three to five seconds, depending on the dog's size; breathe faster for small dogs, slower for large ones.

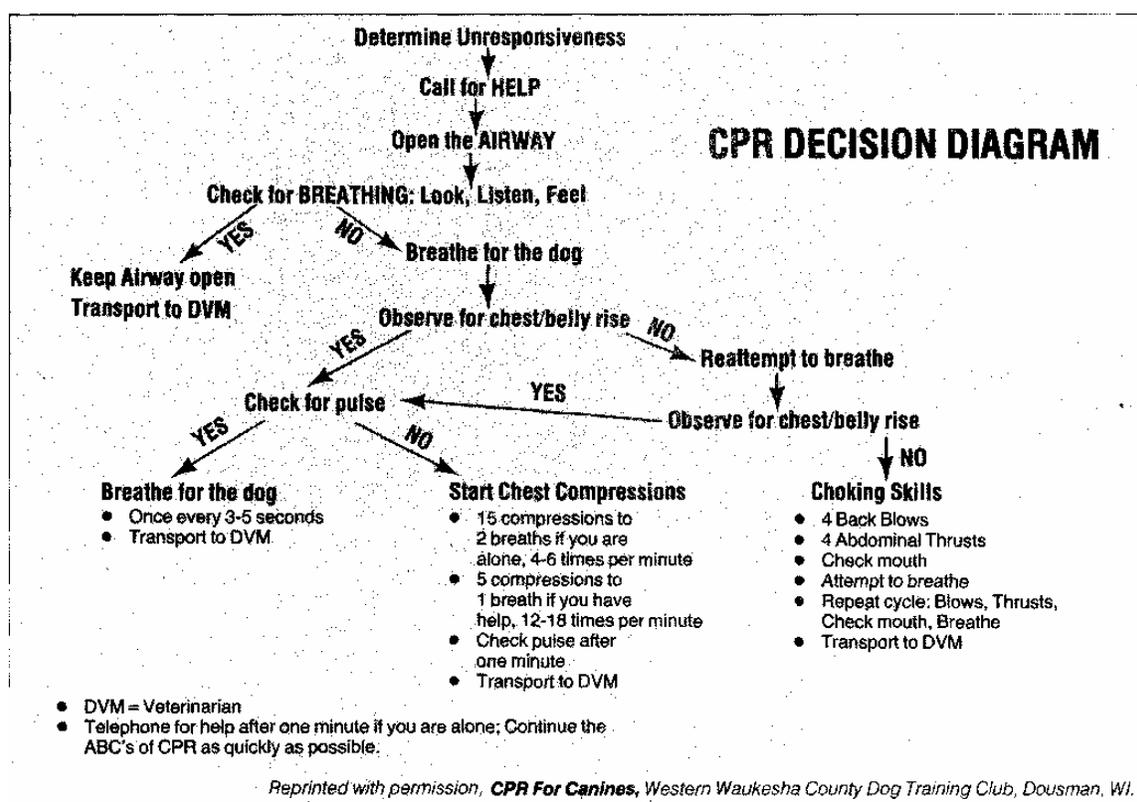
Once you are able to breathe for the dog, and can see the chest rising when you give breath and feel air flowing from the dog's nose after the breath, you are ready to *check the circulation* (C= Circulation). To determine whether the dog has a heartbeat, you need to check for a pulse. The best place to feel for a pulse is inside the thigh on the back leg. Check very carefully, and do not rush. Remember that chest compression, if not needed, can do harm.

If there is no pulse, you will need to begin chest compression. Position the dog on his right side on a firm surface; place hands behind the left front leg over the rib cage; use a firm, downward pressure, and end with a smooth release. The



amount of pressure will depend upon the size of the dog, but, in all cases, the motion must be smooth, not jabbing. Alternate chest compression with Rescue Breathing, with fifteen chest compressions followed by two breaths. This cycle will be repeated four to six times in one minute. After one minute of chest compression and rescue breathing, recheck the dog's pulse. Very often, one minute of CPR is enough to restore breathing and heartbeat. Transport the dog to a veterinarian quickly.

While this brief explanation cannot possibly teach you all you need to know about CPR, I hope you will be prompted to learn more. Take time to learn CPR at your local American Heart Association or American Red Cross; many local fire departments or health care organizations offer classes also. "If only I had known ..." should never be anyone's guilty afterthought when the techniques of cardiopulmonary resuscitation are available for all to learn.



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