

Basic First aid and Wound Management for Pets and Livestock

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Many of us, as pet and livestock owners, will sometimes encounter a wound on an animal, There are several types of open wounds which may occur such as abrasions, incisions, lacerations, punctures and avulsions. Some of them, may not need the animal to be given “systemic” antibiotics (either by mouth or injection) if proper basic wound care is practiced to minimize the chances of the wound developing an infection.

The aim of wound healing is to keep the wound clean and well protected to prevent infection and maggot infestation. Once that is done the need for systemic antibiotics is reduced significantly.

“I had antibiotics at home so I gave it some”, is a statement we hear ever too often from our clients that present animals with wounds, regardless of how severe the wound is. Giving antibiotics without a need for it, and improper dosing are factors

that can lead to antimicrobial resistance. A recent case reflected an example of this: a cat which had a non-healing wound was being treated with antibiotics orally and topically at home with no response. A bacterial culture and sensitivity test on a swab from of the wound was done and revealed a combination of *Staphylococcus* and *Klebsiella* bacteria which were resistant several available antibiotics. Eventually the infection overwhelmed the animal and its life was lost as a result.

If your pet becomes wounded at home or on the farm and you are unable to get the animal immediate veterinary attention, here are some tips you can follow prior to the pet being assessed by the vet

- To clean the wound, first clip the hair away from the wound, then wash the wound under clean running water for 5 minutes. This will help to get rid of debris, such as dirt that may have accumulated at the site during injury. Next, clean the wound with a non-stinging antiseptic solution such as chlorhexidine (Salve®). Hydrogen peroxide or alcohol use is not recommended as they are irritating and may cause pain. Pat the wound dry. Gauze is preferred to cotton because cotton fibres may adhere to the wound and cause more inflammation.
- If the wound is small or superficial, apply an over the counter antibacterial ointment or powder, screwworm prevention daily until it heals. If it is a large or deep laceration or avulsion, if possible apply a light bandage and get the animal assessed by the veterinarian as soon as possible. If treated in less than six hours, the wound may be safely stitched without much risk of breakdown. If there is a delay you may need to dress it as for a small wound until you get the animal seen.



Dr. Thompson with a dog wearing an "Elizabethan Collar - a special cone which prevents the dog from licking or chewing at a wound on its body. The animal can still eat and drink normally with the cone in place.

- Prevent the animal from licking the wound – this can cause infection from the bacteria in the mouth. An Elizabethan collar, (cone) or bucket can be used around the animal’s neck, for this. Keep the animal clean and dry until it can be seen by the veterinarian. Failure to comply with these basic rules may result in maggot infestations; more expensive medical or surgical bills or worse, cause loss of life.