The purpose of this badge is to prepare the handler to react quickly and calmly in the event of an emergency that involves a sick or injured dog. Confidence in knowing what to do in such an emergency greatly increases the positive outcomes in these situations. The information below serves as an outline for how this badge can be taught in a classroom-like environment or it can be used for self-study. The information focuses on educating the handler in canine first aid protocols. It does not review the dog’s requirements for the badge as the dog’s role is passive, and primarily involves his cooperation with processes that may be required should he become sick or injured.

**ARRIVING ON THE SCENE OF AN ACCIDENT:**

**Safety should be the top priority** when arriving on the scene of an accident that involves and injured dog. Though the instinct may be to rush right in and quickly begin to assist, that approach is not the best as it may put the handler and/or in danger. Emotions run high particularly if the dog involved belongs to the handler or is one the handler knows well. A measured approach must be taken since the handler becoming injured decreases the likelihood that the dog will survive and/or recover.

First, **observe the scene**.

* Assess the safety of the location. Watch for traffic, downed power lines, other animals or anything else which may cause injury or death to any human or other animal.
* Call for assistance. DO NOT call 911 unless human injury is involved. Call the Animal Shelter, Humane Society or someone else who may have more expertise than you do.
* Watch the dog’s behavior. Do not approach if the dog shows any sign that he might be dangerous.

**Approach with caution**.

* Avoid direct eye contact with the dog. He may see that as a challenge.
* Speak to the dog as you approach using a soft and soothing voice
* Allow the dog to sniff the back of your hand.

Attempt to **capture the animal** using a leash, or by tossing a towel or blanket or the dog. If the dog is small, he can be lifted very carefully into a box. Make sure the dog is protected until help arrives.

A dog looking at the camera

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**Muzzle the dog**, but only after determining that the dog is not vomiting, coughing or having breathing difficulties. A standard nylon muzzle should be a part of any standard first aid kit kept in a vehicle. Basket type muzzles are okay to use with an injured dog. You can also make an emergency muzzle out of a leash, soft rope, gauze or even nylon stockings.

A drawing of a person

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Making an emergency muzzle.

Check the extent and location of the injuries and **restrain the dog** using a headlock, scruffing him, or having him lie on his side.

Prepare to **transport the dog** by carrying him, putting him in a box or using a blanket. Small dogs can be carried by cradling him in your arms. Larger dogs should be carried by putting an arm around his neck and cupping the other arm behind the hind legs, if the injury is abdominal, or cupping the arm under the belly if the dog has a hind leg injury.

**RECOGNIZING AN EMERGENCY:**

Emergencies can take many forms. Knowing what to look for provides a lot of information that helps you to assist the dog. The list below provides some examples of emergencies you may encounter.

* Trauma such as from a car accident, gunshot would, etc.
* Difficulty breathing or labored breathing
* Seizures that last more than 2 minutes or repeating seizures
* Cuts or gashes that allow exposure of internal organs
* Excessive bleeding, or bleeding that spurts or is prolonged
* Open wounds with visible bone or severe tissue damage
* Heat Stroke or hyperthermia, where the body temperature is too high
* Hypothermia, where the body temperature is too low
* Poisoning or suspected poisoning
* Shock
* Burns
* Profuse diarrhea or vomiting, or vomiting blood
* Straining to eliminate when urinating or defecating
* Unconsciousness
* Painful or enlarged abdomen
* Problems whelping
* Severe depression
* Prolonged anorexia

**NORMAL VITAL SIGNS:**

By knowing your dog’s normal vital signs, you can easily know when they might be abnormal. Being able to quickly and confidently assess vital signs takes practice, so practicing on your dog when there is no emergency present.

**Normal heart rate**

The heart rate, or pulse can be easily measured in the following locations:

* The left elbow where it touches the chest
* The inner thigh or groin area, where the leg meets the body wall
* Just below the wrist or ankle, above the middle pad

Pulse should always be measured using a light touch and never using the thumb. Both of these increase the likelihood that the pulse you may be measuring is your own.

Normal heart rates vary from one dog to the next and can depend on size. Dogs said to have ‘athletic’ hearts may have normal heart rates that are lower than expected. For these reasons it’s important to know what your dog’s normal rate is. Practicing assessing the dog’s heart rate can help you get an accurate measure when it really counts.

* Toy, miniature and small dogs 30 pounds or less average 100-160 beats per minute
* Medium and large dogs average 60-100 beats per minute
* Puppies from birth to age 1 average 120-160 beats per minute

As you can see, the averages vary quite a bit, so knowing what is normal for your dog is extremely important.

**Normal respirations**

The normal breathing rate for any dog can vary quite a bit depending on how active the dog is at the moment the measure is taken. A dog that has been running around the back yard, swimming, practicing agility or playing fetch or frisbee will naturally have a higher measure of breaths per minute than a dog that is resting on the couch.

When breathing, a dog’s chest normally rises and falls. If the dog’s abdomen is actively expanding instead of the chest, this likely indicates a serious problem. Loud or shallow breaths or breathing that sounds like gasping is likely an emergency and a dog who is not breathing is without question an emergency.

Dogs normally take 10-30 breaths per minute or up to 200 pants per minute. Knowing your dog’s normal respiration rate may be critical in emergency situations.

**Normal temperature**

A dog’s temperature can be taken rectally, under the armpit or in the ear using a thermometer specifically for that purpose. Dogs usually get their temperatures check when they see a veterinarian but knowing how to properly get your dog’s temperature and practicing taking it from time to time can be essential in emergency situations.

A dog’s temperature is normally in the range of 100.2% to 102.8% F. A dog’s temperature that measures below 100 or above 104 IS AN EMERGENCY.

Rectally, the temperature should be taking using plenty of lubrication and inserting the thermometer into the rectum just past the tip of the thermometer. When taking a temperature under the armpit, put the thermometer in the armpit and bring the dog’s fore limb down over the thermometer. Follow manufacture’s directions when using a thermometer designed to put in the ear canal.

**Normal mucus membrane color**

The color of a dog’s mucus membranes can help to indicate if the dog is getting enough oxygen in his bloodstream. The normal color is pink. A dog with pale, blue, yellow, white, brick red or brown mucus membranes needs EMERGENCY INTERVENTION.

To check the color of a dog’s mucus membrane, lift the upper or lower lip and observe the color of the gums and/or inner lip. For breeds with black or dark or membranes, place your thumb on the skin just under the lower eyelid, gently pull down and observe the membrane of the lower eyelid.

**Normal Capillary refill time (CRT)**

Capillary refill time is the time it takes the dog’s gums or inner lip to return to normal pink after pressing on them. Evaluating CRT can help you to know how well the blood is circulating through the dog’s body.

After checking the dog’s membrane color, press lightly on the gums or inner lip. Observe the color as it turns white and then back to pink again. Normal CRT is between 0.5 and 2 seconds. More than 3 seconds indicates AN EMERGENCY.

**SURVEYING THE VICTIM IN AN EMERGENCY:**

An important step in helping any sick or injured dog is to quickly survey the dog making note of things that you can see, hear and measure.

**Inspect the area** by observing the body position and the presence of blood, feces or vomit in the area. Make note of breathing patterns and sounds that you can hear. Check the immediate area around the dog for any other material that will provide you with clues on what happened.

Next, you’ll **check the dog**.

* Is the dog breathing? If not, is his airway clear?
* Is there active bleeding?
* What color are the mucus membranes?
* What is the capillary refill time?
* Is the dog conscious? If so, is he fully alert or does he seem altered?

Because time is critical in emergency situations, the above actions should take no more than 1 minute.

**CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION (CPR):**

CPR is the method used to treat a dog that is not breathing and/or has no heartbeat. CPR is based on the ‘ABC’ principles; Airway, Breathing, Circulation.

Dog Scouts of America offers the [Canine CPR badge](http://dogscouts.org/base/canine-cpr/), which provides the information and knowledge needed to perform this critical procedure in the event is not breathing and/or has no heartbeat. It is recommended that the dog/handler team move on to the Canine CPR badge once all of the requirements for Canine First Aid have been met.