

Dealing with pet emergencies



Your Turn

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Guest columnist

As many pet owners in Las Cruces find out the hard way, our city, indeed all of Southern New Mexico, has been without 24/7 emergency care for pets since 2018. I founded the nonprofit Animal Companions of Las Cruces to address this critical situation, and I get many requests asking what to do in an emergency. Here is what you can currently do.

First, if you have not established with a local veterinarian and have not made sure your pet is up-to-date on vaccinations and is chipped (painless, the law, and best way to make sure your pet is returned if lost), do so immediately. While our veterinary professionals are overwhelmed and short-staffed, they will do their best to get to their established clients during hours of operation, including allowing you to drop off your pet for evaluation and treatment. At present, Las Cruces scores 12 out of 100 for available pet care. Other parts of Southern New Mexico rate only an 11 (American Veterinary Medical Association/Center for Disease Control/Census study). For a full list of veterinarians in Las Cruces, as well as some in Deming and Alamogordo, visit <https://animalcompanionsoflascruces.org/area-vets>. This list includes operating hours and contact information. We update the list on a regular basis.

Second, consider setting up a free account with Vet-Triage, a national consortium of veterinarians who are concerned about the crisis nationwide and have agreed to serve as televet support. We provide a link at <https://animalcompanionsoflascruces.org/vettriage>. Once you have established an account, should you ever need to make that call (video and/or audio), they charge a flat fee of \$50. Afterward, they send you and your veterinarian a full report of diagnosis and action

taken. They can handle 60-80% of incoming problems. If they can tell your pet will need IVs, surgery, or something they cannot handle at distance, they will not charge you but will send you directly to the closest emergency hospital, which is in El Paso. Our veterinary professionals here are familiar with this service and often share the same information with their clients.

Third, avoid pet emergencies by educating yourself about how to keep your pet healthy and what to do if a problem arises. When we met with all of our veterinary professionals, we asked what they need and want, how we might help them. They requested short educational videos to help pet parents avoid emergencies and understand forms of treatment. We recently completed six such short videos with the professional media company NMCO Creative Studio and local veterinarian Dr. Sarah Walley. The videos cover spay/neuter, vaccinations (especially for parvo and distemper, deadly and rampant in our area), snake bite, heartworm, obesity, and cannabis (often ingested when owners leave items where they can be reached). The videos do not promote any one clinic since we support all of our professionals, but are identified with our nonprofit. You can find these for free on YouTube or on our website. Our YouTube channel is <https://www.youtube.com/@animalcompanions>.

Finally, know what we are doing to solve this crisis: offering to host veterinary school externships so we can attract students to return to practice here, recruiting for all of our vet clinics and shelter, holding educational programs, and working with legislators to improve conditions for accessible veterinary care. Our ultimate goal, as our veterinary professionals would also like, is to create, equip, staff, and sustain a 24/7 emergency pet hospital here in Las Cruces. It will take lots of people and our government to reach that goal because it will cost \$2 million to \$5 million. But we won't stop until we reach our goal.