

Resuscitation Code:

**Prepare,
Don't Panic**



What Is a Resuscitation Code?

A resuscitation code is a directive you give us regarding how far you want our medical team to go in trying to revive your pet if their heart stops beating or they stop breathing (an arrest). During an arrest, the veterinary care team will run a code which consists of performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation or CPR. These are critical, high-stress moments, and having your decisions made in advance helps us focus entirely on delivering the care you've chosen, without delay or confusion.

Why It Matters-

In human medicine, patients or their healthcare proxies have conversations with doctors about resuscitation code status regularly during hospital stays. It's considered a standard element in healthcare planning, especially in critical settings. In veterinary medicine, treatment planning for your pet should be no different. By thinking ahead and discussing resuscitation preferences, you are taking a powerful step in planning care and advocating for your pet.

Asking for a resuscitation code is not meant to alarm you and does not always mean your pet is in imminent danger. Having a resuscitation plan in place allows for you to mentally prepare, discuss your options with your clinical team, and decide on the right path of action for your pet. Emergencies are unpredictable by nature and no one plans for their pet to collapse or stop breathing. Yet if it happens, our team must act immediately to try to save your pet. Knowing your wishes before a crisis occurs, and having this information noted in your pet's medical record, ensures your pet receives care that aligns with your values and expectations right away.

CPR in Pets – What It Looks Like

Veterinary CPR isn't identical to human CPR, but many of the principles are the same. When a pet goes into cardiopulmonary arrest, our trained team acts immediately using the latest evidence-based protocols.

Closed Chest CPR involves chest compressions (pushing hard and fast on the pet's chest to manually pump blood to the brain and vital organs), assisted ventilation (uses a hand-held, self-inflating bag to push air and oxygen into a pet's lungs manually inflating them), and administering emergency medications. This process can be performed for up to 20 minutes.

Open Chest CPR may be initiated if compressions are not effective, if it is a large dog, or if there is disease in the chest cavity (fluid or air). It requires opening the chest cavity to access the heart directly for compressions.

These interventions are intense and can be very invasive. While they can be lifesaving, they also have varying outcomes depending on the pet's condition, underlying disease, and how quickly CPR is started. Even if initial CPR is successful, many pet's suffer from post-resuscitation complications such as neurological damage and reperfusion injury.

RVH- Our CPR Code Types

At Reidsville Veterinary Hospital, we use a two-tiered system to make resuscitation codes easy for staff to understand and respond to:

CPR/ Full Resuscitation: In the event of cardiac or respiratory arrest, we will pursue all available measures to revive your pet. This includes closed chest CPR (chest compressions and assisted ventilation), oxygen support, emergency drugs, and monitoring to try and restart your pet's heart and breathing. Open chest CPR (surgical access to the heart) and cardiac massage will be attempted only if deemed necessary by the clinician on the case. This mode of resuscitation is particularly important for large dogs or those with certain diseases (air and fluid in the chest cavity).

DNR/ Do Not Resuscitate: In this case, you have instructed us not to perform CPR or make any resuscitative efforts. We will continue to provide compassionate supportive care and monitoring but will not intervene with lifesaving measures.

Choosing DNR does not mean we stop caring for your pet. Quite the opposite. It means we respect your choice to allow the natural passing of your pet if an arrest occurs, while continuing to provide supportive and palliative care. Pain relief, comfort, and dignity remain our top priorities. For some families, especially those managing terminal illness or end-of-life decisions, a DNR reflects a thoughtful and compassionate decision about quality of life.

Making an Informed Decision

Thinking about your pet in a life-threatening situation can be upsetting and talking about resuscitation can feel overwhelming. However, you're not alone in making these decisions. Our team is here to support and guide you through the process with compassion and transparency.

Here are a few factors to consider when choosing a resuscitation code:

- Your pet's overall health and prognosis
- The level of intervention you are comfortable with
- Your beliefs and values around quality of life
- Financial and emotional considerations

Remember that there is no "right" or "wrong" answer. What matters is that the decision is yours, and it reflects what you believe is best for you and your pet. No one knows your pet like you do, and no one can make these decisions better than you. Our job is to make sure you understand the options, feel empowered to choose, and have our full support with no judgement, no matter your decision.

Emergency situations and talking about resuscitation is hard. But not knowing what to do in a crisis is even harder. By having a resuscitation code in place, you give your pet's healthcare team the chance to be prepared to act according to your wishes. If you have questions, concerns, or need to talk through your options, please don't hesitate to reach out. We're here for you. That's why we do what we do.