

Eye Emergencies

By Dr. Hannah Bigelow, DVM

In my book, eye problems are always an emergency. If the eye looks abnormal or vision is impaired, having your pet seen immediately by a veterinarian could be the difference between vision and blindness, or even loss of the eye altogether. The eye is made up of many different components. The tissues around the eye (adnexa) includes the muscles, nerves, eyelids, and lacrimal glands. The globe (the actual eyeball), in and of itself, has three separate layers - the outer fibrous tunic (cornea and sclera), the middle vascular layer, or Uvea (iris, ciliary body, and choroid), and the inner nervous layers (retina and optic nerve). Within the globe there are even more structures, such as the lens and aqueous (fluid within the eye). There is potential for disease to be associated with each part of the eye. That's a lot of structures to evaluate during an ocular exam!

A complete ocular exam includes not only looking at each eye structure listed above, but checking for facial symmetry and looking for abnormalities in eyelid anatomy. There are several cranial nerves associated with eye movement and vision which must also be assessed. There are specific tests used to evaluate tear production and intraocular pressure. Depending on the findings of the ocular exam, a specialist may be needed to further assess or treat disease.

Many ocular conditions are the results of problems within or surrounding the eye, but others can result from systemic illness. Severely increased blood pressure can cause retinal detachment and loss of vision. Uveitis (inflammation of the eye) is commonly acquired due to systemic illness, such as valley fever, a prevalent fungal disease in this area. Most, but not all, ocular issues can be resolved with early intervention. If you notice that your pet's vision is impaired or the eye looks abnormal, make sure you get them to your vet immediately. Remember, eyes are always an emergency! Together, we can improve the life of every pet, every time.

