



In a hairy situation? Pet first aid can help.

By Kristen Erekson

With dreams of becoming veterinarians dancing in their heads, the Shea sisters of Waltham got their first taste of the profession in a class on how to give first aid to animals.

Meaghan Shea, 11, and Brighid Shea, 9, along with the Watertown 4-H Rabbit Habit Club, whipped out bandages and stethoscopes Thursday at the Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center of New England in Waltham.

The animal lovers - between the ages of 7 and 14 - learned various treatments for injured animals such as checking vital signs, basic wound care and how to make a first aid kit.

"I liked bandaging the dog's feet," Meaghan said. "It definitely made me want to be a vet. It's just really cool that vets can help animals and their owners."

The Sheas decided to organize a field trip to the facility after their dog, Gus, was violently ill on a weekend in February. The family took her to the center, where the girls saw fliers about the free first aid class.

Dr. Heather Chalfant, a vet who teaches the animal assistance workshop, said it's surprising how basic first aid pet principles - such as stashing saline solution to flush out an animal's eye or wound - can save a pal's life.

"People should learn basic first aid for their pet so they can realize when they are ill and it's an emergency," she said. "A lot of owners wait for the illness to get better, but instead it gets worse."