

Pets and Hot Weather

Heat kills. Excessive heat is responsible for the most weather-related fatalities in the U.S. during an average year. Climate change makes it worse. Loss of trees contributes to greater heat and the urban heat island effect. Unlike us, pets don't sweat. Their cooling mechanism is done through panting and limited evaporation from the paws. It's up to us to manage their exposure to sun and higher temperatures. What can you do?

Keep your pets safe: Provide plenty of fresh, cool water and shade for your pets.

Never leave pets in a parked car or enclosed space without AC: Cars can heat up to dangerous temperatures very quickly, even in cool temperatures. Leaving a window open is not enough - temperatures inside a car can rise almost 20 degrees Fahrenheit within the first 10 minutes, even with a window cracked open.

Taking your dog for a walk: Asphalt temperatures can reach over 150 degrees Fahrenheit. Air temperature is not always predictive of asphalt temperature. If the sidewalk or path is too hot to keep your bare hand or foot on it for more than 5 seconds, then it is too hot for your pet.

Avoid the sun on pavement when possible. Go for walks before 9am or after 7pm to reduce the risk of injuring your pet's paws. Walk on grass, dirt or other cooler surface to prevent thermal contact burns. If walking on asphalt in mid-day is unavoidable, purchase booties to protect their paws.

Signs of injury include but are not limited to: blisters, ulcers, difficulty walking, not wanting to jump or play, having a gait that mimics "walking on egg shells," lethargy and decreased appetite. If your pet is showing any of these signs, please seek veterinary care as soon as possible.

Recognize the Signs of Heat Exhaustion in Pets: Signs include: increased panting or drooling, being restless or uncomfortable, drinking more than the usual amount of water, trying to get your attention, weakness, uncoordinated movement, diarrhea, vomiting, and seizure.

This as a pet emergency: get your pet to help right away. Move them to an area with air conditioning, out of direct heat. Check for shock: collapse, body temperature 104° F+, bloody diarrhea or vomit, depression stupor, seizures or coma, excessive panting or difficulty breathing, increased heart rate, salivation.

Take your pet's temperature: anything over 103.5 is considered hyperthermia. Spray your pet with cool water, then retake temperature. Place water-soaked towels on the pet's head, neck feet, chest and abdomen. Take your pet to the nearest veterinary hospital.

During a heat crisis, the goal is to decrease the dog's body temperature to 103° F in the first 10-15 minutes. Once 103° F is reached, stop the cooling process immediately because the body temperature will continue to decrease and can plummet dangerously low if you continue. You must still take the dog to a veterinarian as soon as possible because consequences of heat stroke do not show up for hours or even days. Potential problems include abnormal heart rhythms, kidney failure, neurological problems and respiratory arrest.

Dogs predisposed to heat stroke are dogs with short snouts (such as bulldogs and pugs) and those who have a previous episode of heat stroke. Also, those who are left in a parked car, undergoing excessive exercise in hot humid weather, who lack cool, shaded shelter outdoors, thicker-coated dogs in warm weather, and those with underlying disease such as upper airway, heart or lung disease are also vulnerable.