

Dog Care: Summer Pet Care

by the American Animal Hospital Association

When the lazy days of barbecues and swimming pools roll around, you can make them even better by sharing them with your favorite pet. By following a few summer pet safety tips, you can keep your animal friends healthy and enjoy the months of sun and fun.

- **Never leave your pet in the car.** Though it may seem cool outside, the sun can raise the temperature inside your car to 120 degrees Fahrenheit in a matter of minutes, even with the windows rolled down. If you need to run some errands, leave the furry ones at home.
- As you're outside enjoying the warm weather, **keep your pet leashed.** It will keep her from getting lost, fighting other animals, and eating and drinking things that could make her sick. This tip isn't just for dogs--even cats can learn to walk on a leash if you train them.
- **Water, water everywhere.** Whether you're indoors or out, both you and your pet need access to lots of fresh water during the summer, so check her water bowl several times a day to be sure it's full. If you and your furry friend venture forth for the afternoon, bring plenty of water for both of you.
- **Pets need sunscreen too.** Though all that fur helps protect her, your pet can get sunburned, particularly if she has light skin and hair. Sunburn in animals can cause problems similar to those it can cause in people, including pain, peeling, and skin cancer. So keep your pet out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., and when you do go out, rub a bit of sunblock on unprotected areas like the tips of her ears, the skin around her lips, and the tip of her nose.
- **Say no to tangles.** Keeping your pet well groomed will help her hair do what it was designed to do: protect her from the sun and insulate her from the heat. If she has extremely thick hair or a lot of mats and tangles, her fur may trap too much heat, so you may want to clip her.
- **Watch out for antifreeze.** Hot weather may tempt your pet to drink from puddles in the street, which can contain antifreeze and other chemicals. Antifreeze has a sweet taste that animals like, but it's extremely toxic. When you're walking your pet, make sure she doesn't sneak a drink from the street.
- **Be cautious on humid days.** Humidity interferes with animals' ability to rid themselves of excess body heat. When we overheat we sweat, and when the sweat dries it takes excess heat with it. Our four-legged friends only perspire around their paws, which is not enough to cool the body. To rid themselves of excess heat, animals pant. Air moves through the nasal passages, which picks up excess heat from the body. As it is expelled through the mouth, the extra heat leaves along with it. Although this is a very efficient way to control body heat, it is severely limited in areas of high humidity or when the animal is in close quarters.
- **Make sure your pet doesn't overexert herself.** Though exercise is an important part of keeping your dog or cat at a healthy weight, which helps her body stay cool, overdoing

it can cause her to overheat. Keep the walks to a gentle pace and make sure she has plenty of water. If she's panting a lot or seems exhausted, it's time to stop.

- **Take it easy on pets that can't deal with the heat.** Elderly, very young, and ill animals have a hard time regulating their body temperature, so make sure they stay cool and out of the sun on steamy summer days. Dogs with snub noses, such as Pekingese, pugs, and bulldogs, have a hard time staying cool because they can't pant efficiently, so they also need to stay out of the heat. Overweight dogs are also more prone to overheating, because their extra layers of fat act as insulation, which traps heat in their bodies and restricts their breathing capabilities.
- **Bring them inside.** Animals shouldn't be left outside unsupervised on long, hot days, even in the shade. Shade can move throughout the afternoon, and pets can become ill quickly if they overheat, so keep them inside as much as possible. If you must leave your pet in the backyard, keep a close eye on her and bring her in when you can.
- **Keep an eye out for heatstroke.** Heatstroke is a medical emergency. If you suspect your pet has heatstroke, you must act quickly and calmly. Have someone call a veterinarian immediately. In the meantime, lower the animal's body temperature by applying towels soaked in cool water to the hairless areas of the body. Often the pet will respond after only a few minutes of cooling, only to falter again with his temperature soaring back up or falling to well below what is normal. With this in mind, remember that it is imperative to get the animal to a veterinarian *immediately*. Once your pet is in the veterinarian's care, treatment may include further cooling techniques, intravenous fluid therapy to counter shock, or medication to prevent or reverse brain damage.

Even with emergency treatment, heatstroke can be fatal. The best cure is prevention, and Fido and Fluffy are relying on you to keep them out of harm's way. Summer does not have to be fraught with peril--with ample precaution, both you and your furry friends can enjoy those long, hot dog-days of summer.

Signs of Heatstroke

- Panting
- Staring
- Anxious expression
- Refusal to obey commands
- Warm, dry skin
- High fever
- Rapid heartbeat
- Vomiting
- Collapse