

Hot Weather and Your Pets

By Sherry Woodard

Dogs

One of the most life-threatening mistakes people can make is to leave a dog in a vehicle during hot weather. Dogs can't perspire, as humans do, to cool themselves off via evaporation, so they have to pant to cool themselves. If the air that they are taking in is too hot (as it is in a parked car in hot weather), then panting has little cooling effect and the dog quickly overheats. Many people think their dog will be okay if they leave the windows open, but even with the windows wide open, the car can quickly become hot enough to cause heatstroke, brain damage, and even death. Your pet may pay dearly for even a few minutes spent in a sweltering car.



You should never let your dog ride in an open pickup truck, but it's especially dangerous in hot weather, since truck beds are often dark colors, which get very hot. Please leave your pets at home during hot weather.

Over-exposure to heat causes many of the same symptoms as shock. You will see rapid, shallow breathing, weakness, and a very high body temperature. Cool the animal as quickly as possible by spraying him with cool (not cold) water or wrapping him in cool, moist towels. Because of the many problems caused by an elevated body temperature, seek professional help immediately.

If you walk your dog on lead, keep in mind that asphalt can get very hot during the summer. In fact, it can get hot enough to burn a dog's pads, causing him pain for days. Before taking your dog for a walk, check the ground for hotness with one of your own hands or bare feet. If you can't keep your hand (or foot) on the ground for more than three seconds, it's probably too hot to walk your dog. Also, if you have an older dog or an overweight dog, you might want to do only short walks early in the morning or later in the evening, when the temperatures are lower.

Providing water for your dog is always important, but it's especially critical during hot weather. If your dog is inside during the day, make sure you supply fresh, cool water that remains in a shaded spot throughout the day, since sun coming through a window can heat a bowl of water.

If your dog stays outside during the day, make sure his water bowl isn't in a place where he will tip it over. Water bowls can be tipped over by dogs trying to make a cool spot to lay down. If necessary, buy a tip-proof water bowl. Also, make sure he has a shady place where he can get relief from the sun. Kiddie pools are a nice way to give dogs their own clean puddle in which to play.

Grooming all dogs, even dogs with short coats, helps to keep them comfortable as the seasons change. A natural coat that has been groomed offers protection from sunburn and acts as cooling insulation. Shaving your dog's coat will take away that protection. If you give your dog a close cut for summer, she may need sunscreen.

Cats

Cats, of course, also need plenty of cool water during hot weather. White cats can become sunburned if they lay in the sun too long. Even they're indoor cats, they can get sunburned through a sunny window.

Rabbits

Rabbits can also be adversely affected by extremes of temperature. To control the temperature of their environment and to keep them safe from predators, rabbits should be kept inside. The temperature inside their houses should not drop below 60 or go above 75 degrees. Heat stroke can occur in a rabbit at 80 degrees.

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