

PetAssist®

Companion's Corner

Cold Weather Pet Safety Tips

You're probably already aware of the risks posed by warm weather and leaving pets in hot cars, but did you know that cold weather also poses serious threats to your pets' health? Here are some tips to keep your pets safe during cold weather:

Know the limits: Just like people, pets' cold tolerance can vary from pet to pet based on their coat, body fat stores, activity level, and health. Be aware of your pet's tolerance for cold weather, and adjust accordingly. You will probably need to shorten your dog's walks in very cold weather to protect you both from weather-associated health risks. Arthritic and elderly pets may have more difficulty walking on snow and ice and may be more prone to slipping and falling. Long-haired or thick-coated dogs tend to be more cold-tolerant, but are still at risk in cold weather. Short-haired pets feel the cold faster because they have less protection, and short-legged pets may become cold faster because their bellies and bodies are more likely to come into contact with snow-covered ground.

Stay inside: Cats and dogs should be kept inside during cold weather. It's a common belief that dogs and cats are more resistant than people to cold weather because of their fur, but it's untrue. Like people, cats and dogs are susceptible to frostbite and hypothermia and should be kept inside. Longer-haired and thick-coated dog breeds, such as huskies and other dogs bred for colder climates, are more tolerant of cold weather; but no pet should be left outside for long periods of time in below-freezing weather.

Make some noise: A warm vehicle engine can be an appealing heat source for outdoor and feral cats, but it's deadly. Check underneath your car, bang on the hood, and honk the horn before starting the engine to encourage a hidden feline to come out.

Check the paws: Check your dog's paws frequently for signs of cold-weather injury or damage, such as cracked paw pads or bleeding. During a walk, a sudden lameness may be due to an injury or may be due to ice accumulation between his/her toes. You may be able to reduce the chance of iceball accumulation by clipping the hair between your dog's toes.

Play dress-up: If your dog has a short coat or seems bothered by the cold weather, consider a sweater or dog coat. Have several on hand, so you can use a dry sweater or coat each time your dog goes outside. Wet sweaters or coats can actually make your dog colder. Some pet owners also use booties to protect their dog's feet; if you choose to use them, make sure they fit properly.

Wipe down: During walks, your dog's feet, legs and belly may pick up de-icers, antifreeze, or other chemicals that could be toxic. When you get back inside, wipe down (or wash) your pet's feet, legs and belly to remove these chemicals and reduce the risk that your dog will be poisoned after he or she licks them off of his or her paws or fur. Consider using pet-safe deicers on your property to protect your pets and the others in your neighborhood.



Stay home: Cold cars pose significant risk to your pet's health. A car can rapidly cool down in cold weather, becoming like a refrigerator, and can rapidly chill your pet. Pets that are young, old, ill, or thin are particularly susceptible to cold environments and should never be left in cold cars. Limit car travel to only that which is necessary, and don't leave your pet unattended in the vehicle.

Prevent poisoning: Clean up any antifreeze spills quickly, as even small amounts of antifreeze can be deadly.

Recognize problems: If your pet is whining, shivering, seems anxious, slows down or stops moving, seems weak, or starts looking for warm places to burrow, get them back inside quickly because they are showing signs of hypothermia. Frostbite is harder to detect, and may not be fully recognized until a few days after the damage is done. If you suspect your pet has hypothermia or frostbite, consult your veterinarian immediately.

Source: American Veterinary Medical Association

