



Hot Days Are Hard on Pets

How to Prevent, Detect and Treat Heatstroke

by Shawn Messonnier

As outdoor temperatures heat up, pets may suffer from the effects of increased ambient temperatures. While problems such as squamous cell carcinoma and moist dermatitis (skin hot spots) increase along with temperatures and amount of sun exposure, the most serious heat-related health issue is heatstroke. Holistic vets recommend some simple, commonsense steps that will help and also possibly save a pet's life.

Heat stroke in both people and pets develops when core body temperature rises and stays above a certain level. In dogs and cats, the tipping point tends to be a body temperature higher than 106

degrees Fahrenheit. This can happen more quickly in overheated dogs and cats because they don't have the ability to sweat in order to cool off like people do; this is due to a lack of eccrine sweat glands over most of their body surface.

Panting can reduce body temperature, but is inefficient and easily overwhelmed if their temperature rises quickly and a pet can't remove itself from the surrounding warm environment. Dogs such as pugs and bulldogs that have a short, broad skull are especially at risk due to genetically impaired breathing structures; they can easily overheat even in mildly warm weather.

Ferrets and rabbits are especially prone to heatstroke because they

typically dwell in cooler temperatures. As a result, these small mammals do best when housed indoors rather than outside; outdoor time should be limited and supervised.

Heatstroke in pets is usually easy to detect for a pet with a history of being in a hot environment from which it cannot escape to cool itself in shade or water or take a refreshing drink. Excess panting, dark red gums and a "hot feel" to the ears and hairless skin of the abdomen are clues.

First-aid involves quickly cooling the animal and notifying the veterinarian that a pet suffering from heatstroke is on the way. Wetting it will begin the process. Applying either ice packs or

ice cubes in a plastic bag wrapped in a towel to avoid freezing the skin also helps. Recommended spots for the packs are on the back of the neck, armpits and groin, as these areas have large arteries and veins close to the surface. If possible, don't spend much time on these actions, because getting the pet to the doctor quickly is the overriding goal. Administering homeopathic drops of arnica and hypericum via the mouth from a natural home first-aid kit while en route to the vet may assist healing.

Treatment at the veterinary hospital involves continued cooling, including intravenous fluids and cool water enemas. Cooling the pet must be done quickly in order to restore enzyme systems to normal functioning. Hospitalization will likely be required to evaluate the patient for potential serious complications, including cardiac arrest, shock, septicemia, bloody diarrhea, and disseminated intravascular coagulation to ensure against a usually fatal disorder involving the pet's blood-clotting mechanisms. With prompt assistance, most pets with heatstroke will recover, but treatment can be extensive and expensive. The most important aspect is initiating it early to prevent permanent organ and brain damage.

Prevention is ideal and preferred over

the need for treatment. Guard against leaving furred pets outdoors for extended periods of time during hot weather. Pets that must be outside need protection from the heat and sun in shaded areas with access to plenty of fresh cool water; provide several water bowls.

Opinion is divided about whether longer-haired pets seem more comfortable and have fewer weather-related problems if their hair is cut short, but don't cut it down to the skin, as that removes their protective coat and predisposes them to sunburn. A good rule of thumb is that if it's too hot for the pet's person, it's too hot for the pet.

*Shawn Messonnier, a doctor of veterinary medicine practicing in Plano, TX, is the award-winning author of *The Natural Health Bible for Dogs & Cats* and *Unexpected Miracles: Hope and Holistic Healing for Pets*. For more information, visit PetCareNaturally.com.*