

Spring & Summer Safety for Dogs - Warm Weather Hazards

We've all heard the warning, "NEVER leave a dog alone in a parked car in warm weather", but every Spring and Summer dogs suffer and die in vehicles that become ovens in a matter of minutes. Leave your dog at home if you'll be going anywhere pets are not allowed.

Many people don't realize how quickly the temperature can rise inside a car in warm weather. Temperatures do not need to be extremely high outside to reach dangerous levels inside. Even in the low 80's, a parked car can quickly become unbearable. In just 10 minutes the inside temperature can reach 102° or more, even with the windows slightly opened. By 110° your dog will have a heatstroke! On hot and humid days, the temperature in a car parked in direct sunlight can rise more than 30 degrees per minute and become lethal in just a few minutes.

Short nosed breeds such as pugs and bulldogs, who can't pant as efficiently as other dogs, young puppies, senior dogs, over-weight dogs, and dogs with respiratory, cardiovascular or other health problems are even more susceptible to heat related stress than other dogs. Take extra precautions to prevent over-exertion and keep them cool and comfortable.

Know the signs of heatstroke

Heavy panting is the first sign followed by huffing and puffing - a staring expression - warm, dry skin - failure to respond to hearing his name - rapid heartbeat - profuse salivation - vomiting or collapse. If left untreated the dog will become unconscious and die.

If your dog should become overheated, you must take measures to cool him and lower his body temperature immediately. Move the dog to a cool place, out of the sun and give him water. Immerse an overheated dog in cool, not cold, water or very gently pour cool water on him. Place ice packs on his head and neck. A fan, placed in front of the dog will aid in evaporation. See a veterinarian, but only after you cool the dog.

According to Dr. William Fortune, a professor at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Kansas State University, "Dogs become less efficient at cooling themselves as the humidity rises. Just like people, dogs are cooled by evaporation. The problem with high humidity is that it decreases evaporation and slows down the cooling process. This time of year we hear a lot about the heat index, which is a measurement of both the temperature and the humidity level, and that is what an owner needs to pay close attention to. There are other factors that hinder canines' ability to cool themselves. They only have sweat glands on the pads of their feet and on their nose, which are inadequate for cooling during hot and humid days. Panting helps dogs cool themselves but they still aren't as efficient at cooling themselves as people are."

Don't tie your dog outside, especially in hot weather. Chains on dogs tied to trees or poles can easily become tangled, making it impossible to reach shade and water. If, for any reason, it's unavoidable for a short time, put the dog in a shaded area and provide lots of water in a heavy spill proof container. Use a standard nylon, fabric or leather buckle-type collar. Never hook a tie-out chain to a choke type training or correction collar any time of year. Make sure there's nothing

your dog can reach to get the chain tangled on. Remember that shady areas might become hot and sunny areas as the day progresses.

Keep medium and long haired dogs especially well-groomed in summer. A well-groomed heavy coat protects the dog from the sun and acts as insulation from the heat. When long or thick hair becomes tangled and matted, the mats may trap the heat instead.

Some dog owners who spend a lot of time outside in summer, keep a molded plastic child's wading pool in the back yard for their dogs to play in and cool off in the summertime. Since dogs will inevitably drink their pool water, no matter how many bowls of fresh clean water are nearby, and since it will get dirty much faster than a pool used by many rowdy children, change the water at least once a day.

Never walk your dog mid-day during a heat wave. Skip long walks altogether or limit walks and outdoor exercise to early morning or late evening for any dog, young or old. You're wearing shoes and might not think about how hot sun drenched sidewalks and roads can become. When air temperatures approach 100 degrees, the surface temperature of asphalt can cause second degree burns on a dogs paws in as little as 10 minutes of walking. Don't expect a normally faithful dog to suddenly refuse to follow you. Some dogs will do anything to stay by their master's side.

A dog with a "fair complexion" can get sunburned. If your dog has a thin, light coat and you plan to take him outside for any length of time on a sunny summer day, apply sunscreen to his nose and ears about 1/2 hour before going out.

Water

Hazards

While it's true that most dogs can swim, some dogs are initially afraid of water and some dogs will never like swimming and water activities. If your dog doesn't jump right in or seems afraid of the water at first, let him/or her get used to it gradually. Never throw a nervous, inexperienced swimmer in the water. With gentle encouragement most dogs will soon realize that they can "do the doggie paddle" quite well.

Just as people who are experienced swimmers have drowning accidents, dogs can too. Retrieving games can be fun, but they can also be tiring, especially for very young dogs and older dogs. Rough currents or steep slippery banks can be too much for a dog who's already exhausted. Cold water can be dangerous. Though many Northern breeds and retrievers are well equipped for cold water temperatures, water that's too cold for people is too cold for many dogs. Unless you have steps to access your pool and your dog has already used them to get out of the water, prevent unsupervised swimming by raising ladders and locking pool gates.

If you spend time at the seashore in summer, and pets are allowed on the beach, always provide an adequate shady area and lots of fresh drinking water for your dog. Rinse thoroughly, from head to tail, after any time on the beach. (Another good use for a kiddie pool) Salt and sand can be very irritating, especially to paws and ears. Always dry inside the ears after every swim, bath, or rinse.

At home and while traveling, keep your dog away from any source of stagnant water. Drinking polluted standing water that contains certain types of algae can cause rapid, serious illness and death. Ingesting even a small amount of a blue-green algae is extremely dangerous.

Pick-Up

Trucks

Like so many of the dogs who die in over-heated cars, many of the dogs involved in tragic pick-up truck mishaps are much loved pets that their well-meaning but un-informed owners take with them wherever they go. Putting a dog, unsecured, in the back of a pick up truck, is dangerous even if you're only going a few blocks. It's unsafe even if your dog is an obedient and faithful companion who would never, under any circumstances, jump off the truck or make a move without your command. There are also some state-wide laws and laws in cities and counties in various states that prohibit driving with a dog in the bed of a pick-up truck.

There are many possible dangers for a dog riding in the back of an open pick-up. When riding in hot, summer sun, dogs can become overheated and suffer heatstroke. Insects, gravel particles, and other flying debris can cause eye injuries, or lodge in the throat or nasal passages and cause serious problems.

Sudden braking or swerving, even hitting a pothole or bump in the road, can throw a dog off a truck. Dogs that do survive the impact of being hurled onto a road are often hit within seconds by oncoming traffic. The sight of a dog flying off the back of a truck onto a highway can cause a major traffic accident and, in the commotion that follows, a frightened and disoriented dog might manage to get up and run away, in spite of painful bruises and cuts. Most dogs who live through the ordeal must be carried off the road, because of serious injuries like fractures and/or internal trauma and bleeding.

Don't attach a dog's leash or chain to the inside of an open pick-up truck. If a dog tries to jump off or is thrown from the truck, it could be hanged or seriously injured by being dragged along the road before the driver ever realizes what happened.

Never put a dog in a truck bed covered by a tarp or a metal or plastic shell made to fit right over the bed. Temperatures inside will quickly become unbearable in warm weather. Regardless of outdoor temperatures, a pet inside a covered truck bed without ventilation can become a victim of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Anytime a dog must ride in the back of a pick-up truck, place the dog in an airline type kennel or use a covered pet crate and fasten it securely to the truck bed. Always park in the shade in and have drinking water available in hot weather.

Covering a pick up truck bed with a fiberglass shell that has screened windows which can be opened for cross ventilation is a good way to safely transport pets in a pickup truck. A camper shell provides protection in bad weather and it can be locked so no one else can get to the dogs. Add a rubber bed liner and blankets for comfort and a secure crate for longer trips.

If there's no room for your dog to ride in the cab with you, and you can't provide the security of a camper shell or at least a secure crate for protection from summer sun and heat, lovingly leave your dog safely at home.