

Heatstroke In Dogs

This has been an unusually warm spring and early summer in Manchester. As I write this, the forecast is calling for a 90 degree day. As we approach the July 4th holiday weekend many people will be taking pets on trips in cars or be going to the beach. There are several important details that must be observed in order to protect our pets from a dangerous medical condition called hyperthermia or heatstroke.

Heatstroke can occur when normal body mechanisms cannot keep the body's temperature in a safe range. Animals do not have efficient cooling systems like humans who can cool their bodies by sweating and get overheated easily. A dog with moderate heatstroke (body temperature from 104° to 106°F) can recover within an hour if given prompt first aid and veterinary care. The normal body temperature of a dog is 100-102.5°F. Severe heatstroke with a body temperature over 106°F can be deadly and immediate veterinary assistance is needed.

A dog suffering from heatstroke will display some typical signs. They may include: rapid panting, bright red tongue, red or pale gums, thick sticky saliva, depression, weakness, dizziness, vomiting, diarrhea, shock and coma.

Emergency Care:

Remove the dog from the hot area immediately. Prior to taking him to your veterinarian, lower his temperature by wetting him thoroughly with cool water (for very small dogs, use lukewarm water), then increase air movement around him with a fan. **Be careful!** Using very cold water can actually be counterproductive. Cooling too quickly and especially allowing his body temperature to become too low can cause other life-threatening medical conditions. The rectal temperature should be checked every 5 minutes. Once the body temperature is 103°F, the cooling measures should be stopped and the dog should be dried thoroughly and covered so he does not continue to lose heat. Even if the dog appears to be recovering, take him to your veterinarian as soon as possible. He should still be examined since he may be dehydrated or have other complications.

Allow free access to water or a children's rehydrating solution if the dog can drink on his own. Do not try to force-feed cold water; the dog may inhale it or choke.

Treatment:

Your veterinarian will lower your dog's body temperature to a safe range and continually monitor his temperature. Your dog will be given fluids, and possibly oxygen. He will be monitored for shock, respiratory distress, kidney failure, heart abnormalities, and other complications, and treated accordingly. Blood samples may be taken before and during the treatment. The clotting time of the blood will be monitored, since clotting problems are a common complication.

Dogs with moderate heatstroke often recover without complicating health problems. However, severe heatstroke can cause organ damage that might need ongoing care such as a special diet prescribed by your veterinarian. Dogs who suffer from heatstroke once have an increased risk for getting it again and steps must be taken to prevent it on hot, humid days.

Prevention:

Any pet that cannot cool himself off is at risk for heatstroke. Following these guidelines can help prevent serious problems.

1. Keep pets with predisposing conditions like heart disease, obesity, older age, or breathing problems cool and in the shade. Even normal activity for these pets can be harmful.
2. Provide access to water at all times.
3. Do not leave your pet in a hot parked car even if you're in the shade or will only be gone a short time. The temperature inside a parked car can quickly reach up to 140 degrees.
4. Make sure outside dogs have access to shade.
5. On a hot day, restrict exercise and don't take your dog jogging with you. Too much exercise when the weather is very hot can be dangerous.
6. Do not muzzle your dog.
7. Avoid places like the beach and especially concrete or asphalt areas where heat is reflected and there is no access to shade.
8. Wetting down your dog with cool water or allowing him to swim can help maintain a normal body temperature.
9. Move your dog to a cool area of the house. Air conditioning is one of the best ways to keep a dog cool, however, it is not always available and there are several alternatives. To provide a cooler environment a

pet owner can freeze water in plastic bottles, or place ice and a small amount of water in several resealable food storage bags, wrap them in a towel and put them on the floor for the dog to lay on.

If you suspect your dog may be suffering from heat stroke, contact your local veterinarian immediately. Some veterinarians provide urgent care daily, all veterinarians provide a referral telephone number to an emergency facility.