

# Heat Stroke in Pets

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Heat stroke in pets is an all too common problem in the Southeast, especially in the summer months. Dogs and cats are very susceptible to high temperatures, even when exposed for only a short period of time. While humans rely on sweating to dissipate heat, most dogs and cats have thick coats and have to cool their bodies by less effective measures like panting, posture changes, and grooming (cats). Heat stroke occurs when the animal's body cannot dissipate heat fast enough to keep up with the heat load. This results in a rapid progression of illness and can quickly result in death. Signs of heat stroke include vomiting, diarrhea, bleeding disorders, cardiac arrhythmias, staggering, seizures, blindness, and coma.

While no animal should be left in a situation where they are exposed to the elements, large breed dogs and short-nosed breeds are more susceptible to heat stroke and extra measures should be taken to avoid problems.

Temperatures can rise very rapidly in closed environments with poor ventilation (inside a car with closed windows). A car exposed to direct sun may reach 120 F in less than twenty minutes, even on a moderately hot day. Other situations to avoid are leaving an animal outside without water or shade and over-exercising in a warm environment. Make sure water containers are large enough to provide water at all times and secure enough so they cannot be turned over. And, do not chain dogs outside as this may cause a choking hazard and may not allow them to seek shade. Also, clipping heavy coated dogs during the summer months and allowing unaccustomed dogs to slowly acclimate to warm weather may help avoid problems.

If you think your animal is experiencing heat stroke the most important thing is to get them to a veterinarian immediately. There are also measures you can take in the meantime that may help save the animal's life. Obviously, lowering the body temperature is the goal. It may seem that an ice water bath is the quickest way to do this. However, this is not recommended because it may cause shunting of the hot blood to vital organs and slowing of the cooling process because of small vessel constriction. The most effective way to cool the animal quickly is to wet it down and cool it with a large fan. You may also try soaking the foot pads with alcohol. Your veterinarian will take more drastic measures with medications, intravenous fluids, oxygen supplementation, and intense monitoring of body temperatures.

Remember, heat stroke is a very serious emergency that may be easily avoided using common sense. Dogs and cats do not tolerate heat as well as humans do. So even if you are comfortable, your pet may be too hot. Let's all enjoy the sun safely!