

Pets and Heatstroke in Summer Hill.

Heatstroke in animals is a killer and can happen frighteningly fast.

Unlike humans, dogs do not cool off by sweating through their skin. The only way they can lower their body temperature is to pant and sweat a little bit through their paws. To pant effectively, they rely on the air around them being cooler than their own temperature; this allows the heat in their moist breath to dissipate and be removed into the environment. They also rely on the environment being a little dry. The air they exhale is 41oC which is why they rapidly overheat in cars.

Dogs suffer heatstroke when...

- their internal body temperature is too high
- the environment is too hot and they cannot seek shade
- there is no access to water on a very hot day.

If dogs are overweight/stocky or short-nosed then they have even more trouble losing heat. If they pant a lot their throats can get swollen and they have even MORE trouble losing heat.

So how do you avoid heatstroke for your pets?

- Provide pets with a cool, shaded area with good ventilation at all times - adequate ventilation and air flow are important as many animals cool down via evaporative cooling (panting) which requires air flow. Air conditioning is best, or at least a fan.
- Provide plenty clean fresh water and extra water sources in case of spillage
- Bring animals indoors on hot days if the indoor environment is cooler for the animal (air-conditioning, child-safe fans, open windows where possible and shade).
- Small animals including rabbits, guinea pigs, ferrets, birds, rats and mice are highly susceptible to heat stress (which can be fatal). **These animals are often confined in cages and hutches and are unable to move away to cooler places.** Owners need to move these animals into a cool, shaded and well-ventilated area in hot weather. They also require clean, fresh drinking water at all times. On very hot days you may need to bring them into a cool place indoors, for example the laundry. Put a frozen bottle of water in with them as well

- Do not exercise animals in hot, humid conditions. On hot days try to walk your dog very early in the morning or very late in the afternoon and avoid the hottest part of the day. **If it is too hot for you, it is especially too hot for your dog.** If you would not walk on the concrete or asphalt in bare feet because it is too hot, your dog should not either.
- **Do not leave your dog in a vehicle** - even when the windows are down, dogs can still overheat and die. One study found that even on mild days the temperature inside the vehicle rises rapidly to dangerous levels. When the ambient temperature is 22°C the temperature inside a car can rise to over 47°C in 30 minutes. The high temperatures in the car combined with inadequate ventilation/air flow mean that the dog cannot thermo-regulate leaving them vulnerable to over-heating which can be fatal. Animals in these conditions suffer horribly - please don't risk it.
- Feed more wet or tinned food. This can help increase the total amount of water your pet will take in one day by up to 250%!

Signs to watch out for

- Heat stroke begins with heavy panting and difficulty breathing. The tongue and mucous membranes appear bright red. The saliva is thick and dogs may vomit. The rectal temperature rises to 40° to 43.3°C. The dog may become progressively unsteady and pass bloody diarrhea. As shock sets in, the lips and mucous membranes turn grey. Collapse, seizures, coma, and death rapidly ensue.

How should you treat a pet with heatstroke?

- Veterinary help should be sought ASAP if heat stroke is suspected. Heat stress is an emergency. Given the seriousness of this condition, it is better to be safe than sorry and have the dog checked out by a vet
- Initial emergency treatment at home should aim to normalise body temperature. Apply or spray cool water onto the animal's fur/skin followed by fanning of the wet fur. Don't use ice-cold water or ice as this may exacerbate the problem.
- Wet them down, maybe cover with a light weight wet cloth & pop into the car (with air con on!) & rush to the Vet. Don't leave a heavy wet towel over them for long because it interferes with heat loss.