

HEAT STROKE

We've had our first pet death from heat stroke already this season at Parkside Animal Hospital .. unfortunately it won't be the last. Is YOUR pet in danger?

Heat stroke is a very serious condition that **requires immediate medical attention**. Once the signs of heat stroke are detected, there is precious little time before serious damage - even death - can occur. Minutes count here... you may have less than one hour from initial symptoms to death.

DOGS: Dogs do not sweat through their skin like humans - they release heat primarily by panting and they sweat through the foot pads and nose. If a dog cannot effectively expel heat, the internal body temperature begins to rise. Once the dog's temperature reaches 106°, damage to the body's cellular system and organs may become irreversible. Unfortunately, too many dogs succumb to heat stroke when it could have been avoided. Learn how to recognize the signs of heat stroke and prevent it from happening to your dog.

Signs of Heat Stroke: The following signs may indicate heat stroke in a dog:

- **Increased rectal temperature** (over 104° requires action, over 106° is a dire emergency)
- **Vigorous panting**
- **Dark red gums**
- **Tacky or dry mucus membranes** (specifically the gums)
- **Lying down and unwilling (or unable) to get up**
- **Collapse and/or loss of consciousness**
- **Thick saliva**
- **Dizziness or disorientation**
- **Seizures or vomiting**

What to do if You Suspect Heat Stroke: If you have even the slightest suspicion that your dog is suffering from heat stroke, **you must take immediate action, GET TO A VETERINARIAN ASAP!**

1. First, move your dog out of the heat and away from the sun right away.
2. Begin cooling your dog by placing cool, wet rags or washcloths on the body - especially the foot pads and around the head.
3. **DO NOT use ice or very cold water or over-cool the pet!** Extreme cold can cause the blood vessels to constrict, preventing the body's core from cooling and actually causing the internal temperature to further rise. In addition, over-cooling can cause hypothermia, introducing a host of new problems. When the body temperature reaches 103°, stop cooling. IMPORTANT: do initial cooling then bring pet to a veterinarian immediately. If you can cool the pet while someone is driving you to the vet, so much the better. Minutes count here, it may make the difference in your pet surviving, or not.
4. Offer your dog cool water, but do not force water into your dog's mouth.

Call or get to your vet right away - even if your dog seems better. Internal damage might not be obvious to the naked eye, so an exam is necessary (and further testing may be recommended).

Tip: recruit others to help you - ask someone to call the vet while others help you cool your dog.

Preventing Heat Stroke: There are ways you can prevent heat stroke from happening in the first place.

- **NEVER leave your dog alone in the car** on a warm day, regardless of whether the windows are open. Even if the weather outside is not extremely hot, the inside of the car acts like an oven - temperatures can rise to dangerously high levels in a matter of minutes.
- **Avoid exercise** on warm days. When outside, opt for shady areas.
- **Keep fresh cool water available** at all times. Place water bowls in shade as they heat quickly in direct sun.
- **Certain types of dogs are more sensitive to heat** - especially obese, elderly or already stressed dogs and brachycephalic (short-nosed) breeds, like Pugs and Bulldogs. Dark coated dogs, dogs with long or heavy coats or coats that are matted are extremely vulnerable. Use extreme caution when these dogs are exposed to heat.
- **BRING PETS INDOORS.** Heat and humidity can combine to dangerous levels even when temperatures are in the 80's

Some dogs can recover fully from heat stroke if it is caught early enough. Others suffer permanent organ damage and require lifelong treatment. Sadly, many dogs do not survive heat stroke.

Prevention is the key to keeping your pet safe during warmer weather.

CATS: Heat stroke is more commonly discussed in dogs, but cats can be affected too. Your pet can't tell you they're not feeling well, but they definitely can show you. Early symptoms of heat stroke and the accompanying dehydration for cats include:

- **Panting**
- **Anxiety**, possibly demonstrated by pacing
- **Increased heartbeat**
- **Respiratory distress or hyperventilation** (Breeds with flat noses may exhibit this earlier because of compromised airways.)
- **Dark red gums**
- **Lethargy**
- **Increased internal body temperature** Your cat's internal temperature should be between 100.5° and 101.5° F. A temperature of 104° or more is a definite warning sign.

How to Help Your Cat Avoid Heatstroke

You can help your cat survive extremely hot weather by keeping pets indoors in a cool interior room. Rubbing him down with a damp towel will help; so will immersing his feet in a tub of cool water. Wrapping a cold compress under the cat's neck will also help cool him off. He may fight at first, but most likely will appreciate it once he gets used to the idea. You might wrap a plastic bag of frozen peas in a towel, and place it in your pet's bed for a cool spot to lie. The peas will rearrange themselves to fit his contours and he'll have a "custom spa" for cooling off.

Make sure your pet has several bowls of cool water available. It doesn't hurt to drop an ice cube in once in awhile, not only to cool the water, but to pique kitty's interest in drinking. Strangely enough, cats affected by external heat may refuse to drink water, exacerbating the problem of dehydration.

If your cat exhibits any of the signs above that lead you to think your pet is suffering heat exhaustion wrap him with cool (NOT ICY) wet towels. Then get him to the veterinarian immediately. This is a serious, potentially fatal condition.

Seek veterinary care IMMEDIATELY if you suspect heat stroke!

Sunburn

White cats/dogs, or pets with white ears and faces, are particularly susceptible to sunburn. Over a period of time, exposure to the sun can cause squamous cell carcinoma, a cancer found most often on the tips of the ears and nose. Early signs are a sore that does not heal, or that bleeds.

White pets should be kept out of direct sun as much as possible, and if they must be in the sun, you can help them prevent sunburn by using a sunscreen on their ears and noses. Your veterinarian can recommend one which will not be harmful if ingested.

**Be aware of your pet's condition on sweltering summer days.
If you have any doubts at all, get him to the veterinarian immediately.**

Do not wait for symptoms to worsen.

Minutes may make the difference in your pet living or not.

Call your vet immediately with any concerns

This article is a portion of the Parkside Animal Hospital e-Newsletter April-May 2010.

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