



Dog Scouts of America Preventing and Treating Heat Stroke

K9 Fitness

Whether temperatures have just started to rise in the spring or summer is in full swing, you need to be aware of how the heat can affect your dog. This can apply when visiting warmer climates with your dog as well. Knowing how to keep your dog cool, how to recognize the symptoms of heat stroke and what to do if it happens could save your dog's life!

Just as it takes us awhile to get used to seasonally warmer temperatures, dogs also have an adjustment period. This can be aided or hindered by how much fur they shed and how often they are brushed. If your dog is not yet used to being in (or exercising in) warmer temperatures take it easy and watch him closely.

ADJUSTING TO AND COPING WITH HEAT:

Give the dog plenty of brushing, especially when he may be going through a shedding cycle. The dog's coat can help insulate the skin from high or low temperatures, but if there is a layer of dead hair blocking a cooling air flow, the dog can overheat more quickly, and heat generated by his body will get trapped close to the skin. Shaving a dog may seem like a good thing to do but it can actually cause more problems than it solves. Instead, just be sure to give the dog a thorough daily brushing to remove dead hair. Using a shedding blade or comb can help reduce mats and dead hair build up more than a soft brush or standard comb.

Limit the dog's time in the heat. Even if the dog is swimming, exertion in high heat can cause his internal temperature to rise to dangerous levels with surprising speed. If the dog is not yet acclimated to the heat, even a simple slow walk could cause danger. This is especially true in short nosed breeds, elderly dogs, young puppies and dogs with thick coats. Give the dog access to a cool basement or air conditioning in the home. If traveling, be sure to use car's air conditioning to cool the dog.

Use a cooling coat or white T-shirt on dark colored dogs. Black and dark fur absorbs the heat from the sun. Putting a special cooling coat, reflective coat or even a simple white T-shirt on the dog can keep him much cooler. Be sure to never leave these on an unsupervised dog.

Water can be a big advantage. Providing access to a kiddie pool that is in the shade can help the dog cool himself. But be sure it stays in the shade, or it might become a hot tub! A sprinkler could also be used if mud is not an issue and the dog doesn't drink too much water. If you know your dog will be exerting himself, wet the dog first. This can be especially effective if water is applied to the areas with thinner hair and where blood vessels are closest to the surface. This includes the head, armpits, legs, belly, feet and groin. Having the dog lie down in a small pool of water just before exertion can help keep his temperature from rising too fast as the evaporating water causes cooling.

Ice treats can help cool the dog. Make the dog a shaved ice snow cone flavored with apple or carrot juice. Ice cubes can be made out of fruit or vegetable juice too. Another fun treat, especially for large dogs, is a bucket of ice with treats and toys frozen into it. As the ice melts or gets chewed/licked more goodies come free. If the ice is removed from the bucket the dog has more sides from which to get the treats.

SIGNS OF HEAT STROKE:



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It's important to learn the signs of heat stroke (Hyperthermia) so you can act quickly if the dog overheats to lower his temperature before internal damage or death occurs. Signs include:

Heavy or labored panting/breathing. If the dog sounds like he's having trouble breathing or can't catch his breath, he may be overheating.

A wide/long tongue. As a dog gets too warm his tongue becomes more visible and widens at the end. It might also get very red from high blood pressure and the body's attempt to get as much blood as possible to the skin surface.

Excessive drooling. As the dog attempts to cool himself by panting, the evaporation in his mouth enhances the effect but causes drooling. This this can cause dehydration, which can cause additional health problems. The dog can only cool himself though his mouth and foot pads. Be careful if the dog is walking on hot pavement as this can also cause a quick rise in body temperature even if the air is not overly warm.

Seeking shade or a cool spot. Dogs usually know when they need to cool down. If the dog is pulling for shade, he may be overheating. A rest in a cool location can bring his temperature down quickly.

Sluggishness or refusing to move. When this happens, the dog is trying to conserve and reduce his energy level, so his temperature doesn't rise further. A dog refusing to move or falling down should be a big warning sign that his temperature is too high.

Muscle weakness. In advancing stages of heat stroke, the dog will not be able to stand or walk.

TREATING HEAT STROKE:

Get cool (NOT cold) water on the dog's head, arm pits, belly, legs, feet and groin. Never use cold water as this could send the dog into shock (like jumping into an ice-cold swimming pool on a hot day.) Rubbing alcohol or wet towels could also be used. Only let the dog drink small amounts to limit vomiting but offer water frequently.

Get the dog into air conditioning such as in a car or building. If not available, get the dog to the shade or a cooler location as quickly as possible.

Get to a veterinarian, even if you think you may have the situation under control. A dog's normal temperature is around 101 degrees and he can only handle 107+ degree internal temperature for a few minutes before internal organ and brain damage starts to occur. Get the dog to a vet even if you are able to bring his temperature back down. He may need IV fluids, further treatment and/or help with the side effects like vomiting, diarrhea, seizures and blood clots. Additionally, the vet can do a blood test to determine if internal organ damage has occurred.

Educate yourself about heat stroke and always use good judgment when exercising outside. If you are in doubt about whether or not heat stroke has occurred, get the dog to a veterinarian immediately. Only participate in activities that are safe for both you and your dog.