



Keeping pets cool during summer time

When temperatures rise, it is really important that you take note of your pet and any wildlife that may be struggling in the heat. Unlike people, most animals aren't able to reduce their body heat through sweat. Instead, dogs try and cool themselves down by panting. Obese animals and brachycephalic breeds (dogs with short snouts including Pugs, French Bulldogs, Boston Terriers) are at a greater risk of overheating and can often develop breathing difficulties. The normal breathing rhythm of a cat should be smooth and unlaboured. If you notice a cat breathing hard with their mouth open or panting, this is often a sign that they are extremely hot, stressed or have an underlying disease process.

Here are some of our tips to try and keep your pets cool during the summer heat.

1. **Water.** What would happen if your pet were to accidentally tip their water over during a very hot day? It is essential that your pet has access to **more than** one water source. If your pet likes to splash around in water, a clam shell pool (eg. from Kmart or Bunnings) is a great way for them to cool down, providing the pool is kept at a shallow depth to prevent accidental drowning when unsupervised. Freeze some water in plastic containers and place these in shady areas around the backyard.
2. **Shade.** All pets MUST have access to shade and somewhere they can shelter away from the direct sunlight. If you are feeling a bit toasty, chances are your pets are feeling it too! Smaller pets including guinea pigs and birds can be quite susceptible to the heat. If there is the opportunity to keep pets indoors and in the cool (air-conditioners or fans), then this is a favourable option. If not, ensure your pet has access to frozen water bottles or wet towels to lean on and help keep themselves cool.
3. **Exercise.** Avoid exercising your pet during the warmer times of day (9am to 3pm). People can wear shoes, but the hot cement can easily burn the pads of your dogs paws. It is best to walk your dog early in the morning or later in the evening.
4. **Cars.** Hot cars can KILL. It is NEVER ok to leave your dog in a car unattended. Keeping windows down an inch or just enough to fit the head of a dog out the window will not enable your dog to regulate their body temperature. Even cars in the shade can get very hot quite quickly. If you notice a distressed dog locked in a car, please phone the RSPCA (1300 CRUELTY 1300 278 3589) or your local police station. For more information visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKI3Im5tV24>. Thousands of dogs are injured each year while traveling on the back of a ute, mostly due to not being appropriately restrained (not tethered to the centre of a ute, no dog harness, no cage, chains or rope becoming entangled). Additionally, ute trays can heat up very quickly and if your dog must be transported on the back

of a ute during a hot day, cover the tray with carpet to prevent burns and offer plenty of water at rest points.

5. **Wildlife.** Keeping bowls of water out for wildlife can help them keep cool. Ensure that there is a stick or large rock in the base of the bowl to prevent accidental drowning.
6. **Bushfire Emergencies.** There has been an increased risk of fires in Australia. Plan early to ensure that your pet will be safely evacuated in the event of an emergency. Ensure your pets microchip details are current (correct address and phone number), any medications are within reach, council tags or other forms of identification are visible. If you have large animals (eg. horses and cattle), remove all of their gear - plastic melts, metal heats very quickly and rugs can catch on fire. Spray paint or use eventing crayon to write your phone number down the side of the animal.

What are the signs of heat stress?

- Excessive panting
- Drooling, increased salivation
- Dark or bright red gums
- Vomiting and/or diarrhoea
- Restlessness, pacing, stumbling, incoordination
- Seizures
- Collapse / coma

What to do if you suspect your pet has heat stress

- Immediately move the animal to a cool area (shaded area).
- Offer water, don't force them to drink it.
- Begin to reduce their body temperature by wetting their body with cool (not cold) water with a hose (gentle pressure) or bucket (don't wet the face), or towel covered ice packs over the back of their neck, under their armpits, groin region and pads of the feet. This is to prevent further organ damage.
- Place them in front of a fan.
- Contact your vet as soon as possible as heat stress can be life threatening.
- **DO NOT** place your pet in iced water as this can have contradicting effects.
- Placing wet towels over the body can trap heat that is trying to escape therefore it is not recommended.

Further reading and references:

<https://veterinarypartner.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=19239&id=4951333>

<https://blog.animalemergencyservice.com.au/heat-stress-in-dogs>

<https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/heat-stroke-in-dogs>

<https://www.sydneyvetspecialists.com.au/signs-of-heat-stroke-in-dogs/>