

# Practice weather-related pet safety all year long

Caring for pets is sometimes compared to raising children. Though the two are not exactly the same, there are similarities between raising a child and caring for a pet. Like curious kids, fearless pets may not understand the potential hazards around them, and some of these dangers differ depending on the season.

## WINTER

Cold weather and snow may make both pets and people less likely to venture outdoors. Dogs and cats that use the yard to relieve themselves often cannot avoid the ice and snow. These conditions can put pets at risk.

As with humans, animals are susceptible to hypothermia and frostbite. When the weather is cold, pets should not remain outdoors without shelter for extended periods of time. The Humane Society of the United States advises that exposed skin on noses, ears and paw pads can quickly freeze and suffer permanent damage. Dogs and cats are safer and warmer indoors.

Provide more water during the winter when the effort it takes for pets to keep their bodies warm can quickly deplete their energy stores. Compensate by giving pets a little more food and water in the winter.

Salt and other chemicals used to melt snow and ice can irritate pet paws. When the animal then licks irritated paws, the chemicals can be transferred to the tongue and mouth. Rinse paws after dogs come in from walks, or use protective booties to keep feet covered. Limit the amount of products you use to melt snow, opting for sand or cat litter for traction.

Pets also may be attracted to automotive antifreeze due to its sweet smell and taste. But antifreeze can be toxic. Coolants and antifreeze made with propylene glycol are less toxic to pets, wildlife and even human beings.

Pet owners will notice their four-legged friends respond differently than humans to certain situations, including the changing weather.

Dogs seem particularly attuned to the weather. Changing weather can affect canines much like it does people, but dogs may also be affected in

ways their owners are not, such as feeling changes in barometric pressure and even in the static electric field that occurs in the air. As electrical storms approach, some dogs may get very anxious, even running and hiding if their anxiety is especially high.

Between 15 and 30 percent of all dogs are extremely scared of thunder and may experience a rapid increase of cortisol, a stress hormone.

Pets may be physically affected by weather, just like their owners are. It seems that dogs and cats feel more stiffness and lameness during adverse weather conditions. Pain resulting from arthritis may increase and muscles may stiffen when the climate becomes cooler.

## SPRING

Spring is a season of rebirth and renewal when pleasant weather has both people and pets eager to get outdoors again. However, certain springtime dangers may be lurking, and it takes an informed pet owner to keep animals safe.

Spring cleaning is a ritual for many families, and cleaning chemicals and products can be

dangerous to inquisitive pets. Use these items properly, and keep dogs and cats away. Birds are especially sensitive to chemical fumes, so move birds out of harm's way when cleaning.

Products used in the yard, such as pesticides, fertilizers, tools and soil additives, may be harmful if ingested. Sharp tools can injure dogs or cats running around the yard. Keep pets out of garden beds when doing lawn and garden work.

As homeowners throw open windows and doors to let fresh air inside, they may not realize broken or torn screens can let indoor animals escape. Examine entry and exit points, making sure they are not easily penetrated, before leaving pets unattended. A lost pet can be struck by a vehicle or be exposed to yard hazards.

## SUMMER

Hot weather can be very hazardous, as heat stroke and dehydration are potential summertime problems for pets. Old and

young pets are less capable of regulating their body temperatures, making them especially susceptible to hot spells. Keep pets indoors during the hottest hours of the day and provide plenty of water.

Some dogs and cats may be good swimmers, but that does not mean they should be left alone in swimming pools. As you would a child, keep a watchful eye on pets when they're in or around pools, lakes and rivers.

Warmer weather brings out the bugs, and so keep pets up-to-date with their immunizations. Mosquitoes can spread diseases that can lead to heartworm and other conditions. Talk to a veterinarian about preventative measures to keep pets healthy.

## AUTUMN

Autumn is a great time of year to spend some time outdoors with your pet. But you must be aware of your surroundings and practice safety. Many animals spend the fall storing food or making accommodations for winter hibernation. Snakes may be out looking for burrows and can be in foul moods. A curious pooch can walk away with a bite if he or she comes up against a grumpy snake looking for a den.

ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center notes mushrooms may be growing in the fall. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to distinguish highly toxic mushrooms from nontoxic ones, so the best way to keep pets from ingesting poisonous mushrooms is to keep them away from areas where mushrooms are growing.

Some people may resort to rodenticides to keep mice and other small animals out of homes when they're seeking warmer places to nest. These products

are highly toxic to pets and can result in death.

Sometimes eating a mouse that has consumed a rodenticide is enough to harm a pet.

Pet owners that use these products must exercise extreme caution or find other methods to curtail rodent infestations.

No matter the season, pet owners must prioritize keeping their pets safe from seasonal hazards. — Metro



**Pets have different needs depending on the time of year and type of weather.**