

Veterinarians give holiday, cold weather safety tips for pets

December 20 2011

Many people remember to winterize their homes and cars for Colorado's colder weather, and it's also important to pay special attention to keeping pets safe and warm.

Here are some tips from Colorado State University [veterinarians](#) to keep pets healthy during [cold weather](#):

- During cold weather, pets need extra shelter and outdoor pets may need to be brought inside. When temperatures dip below 32 degrees, it's a dangerous time for pets – but even warmer temperatures can be dangerous for your [pet](#) if it is wet.
- Outdoor pets need appropriate shelter to protect them from frigid temperatures. Make sure they have access to shelter such as a building or garage that is stocked with food and water. If necessary, provide them with a heated water dish to prevent the water from freezing.
- Be on the lookout for pets seeking warmth in dangerous places such as under warm vehicles.
- Consult with your veterinarian about any dietary adjustments for optimal health during the winter. Active pets may need extra calories.
- When walking a dog in cold weather, remember that their feet are unprotected from cold, so keep walks short – or suspend them during especially frigid weather – and examine their paws before and after each

time you exercise to ensure that they aren't injured.

- When letting pets outside, do so only briefly during extreme cold.
- Pets can experience hypothermia and frostbite. Your pet is in trouble and needs immediate veterinary attention if it is shivering, acting disoriented and lethargic, or its hair is puffed out and standing on end. Signs of frostbite include changes in skin color, particularly if the skin is bright red, pale or black. Skin at the tips of ears and on extremities, including reproductive organs, are particularly at risk.
- Antifreeze is tasty but fatal to pets unless emergency care is started within a few hours. Even small amounts of the substance licked off a cat or dog's paws or lapped off the sidewalk could be life-threatening. Store antifreeze in an area away from pets, and immediately clean up any spills or leaks. If you suspect a pet has ingested antifreeze, seek emergency veterinary care. Symptoms of antifreeze poisoning include drunken-like behavior, vomiting, excessive urination and drinking, and acting depressed and moving in an unstable manner. Pets may appear to recover within a few hours, but antifreeze continues to poison their system and is often fatal.
- Holiday decorations also are interesting distractions, but cats or dogs that ingest decorations and tinsel could end up with a completely obstructed intestinal tract, which can be fatal. Secure ornaments tightly to Christmas trees to prevent pets from playing with them and breaking them, leading to cuts. Christmas trees in homes with particularly mischievous pets may need to be secured to hooks on a nearby wall with guide wires to prevent the pets from knocking the tree over.
- Holiday parties also present a hazard. Pets should be kept in a safe place during celebrations, away from children who may play with them too roughly and away from potentially hazardous food discarded by

guests.

Provided by Colorado State University

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