

Veterinarian says summer pests, heat and activities pose risks to pets

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Credit: Kansas State University

Summer is here and along with the fun days spent outside with your pet comes the itching and scratching from the fleas, ticks and mosquitoes, as well heat-related issues.

For your pet to stay healthy and happy this season, Kansas State University veterinarian and clinical professor Susan Nelson offers some recommendations and simple safety tips. Nelson is with the Veterinary Health Center in the College of Veterinary Medicine.

Starting your furry friend on flea, tick and heartworm preventatives is a must, Nelson said. Ticks are behind such illnesses as Lyme disease, Ehrlichiosis and Rocky Mountain spotted fever, just to name a few. Fleas are behind flea bite anemia, flea allergy dermatitis, plague, tapeworms and Bartonella henslae, which is the cause of cat scratch fever in people. With mosquitoes comes heartworm disease for both [dogs](#) and cats, which is often fatal if left untreated.

"Year-round protection against all these parasites is recommended and there are many choices available for both dogs and cats," Nelson said. "Many of the heartworm preventives guard against several intestinal parasites as well, which are also more prevalent during warmer weather."

Summertime is playtime, but whether playing at home, a dog park or other area, Nelson said to reintroduce your dog slowly to exercise if it has been less active over the past months to prevent injury.

"Make sure dogs are current on recommended vaccinations for your area and review dog park etiquette prior to going to dog parks," she said. "Watch your dog closely when interacting with other dogs as play can often turn too 'ruff' at times."

Driving with your pet also carries some risks in the summertime.

"Above all, never leave your pet confined to the car when temperatures start to rise as heat stroke is too often a fatal consequence," said Nelson, who also has these following safety tips for pets traveling in vehicles.

- Protect dogs' eyes from injury by not allowing them to stick their heads out of the car window while you're driving.
- Keep dogs buckled up or secure in a crate to help avoid injury in case of an accident and to prevent them from getting underfoot of the driver.
- Don't let dogs ride in the bed of the pickup because they can jump out or, in the case of an accident, be ejected.

Hot weather also means hot pavement. Dogs can experience [severe burns](#) to their pads of their feet when walking on hot cement or asphalt pavements, Nelson said.

"Running on rocky ground or other [rough surfaces](#), such as cement, can be hard on tender feet that aren't used to being on these surfaces," she said. "The outer pad covering of the paw can be worn off, leading to exposure and trauma of the tender surfaces below."

To protect paws, Nelson suggests spending short amounts of time at first on these surfaces until the paw pads toughen, or have your pet wear protective booties. Products also are available that can be applied to the pads to help toughen them up.

Water activities are popular during the summer but can be risky for pets. Nelson offers these tips on pets and water safety:

- Properly gate pools to keep out curious pets—and children—and avoid accidental drownings.
- If you take your dog boating, make sure it wears a life jacket if it cannot swim or if you will be far from shore.

- Ensure your dog is vaccinated against Leptospirosis, a potentially deadly disease caused by a type of bacteria often found in lakes, ponds and standing water.
- If your dog goes fishing with you, keep hooks and lures out of reach at all times so dogs can't swallow them or get them stuck in a lip, both situations often ending up with a trip to the veterinarian.

Summer plants may be bloom, but some of them are toxic to pets, such as azaleas and rhododendrons, and all parts of lilies—including the pollen—are toxic to cats, Nelson said.

"Herbicides, fertilizers and insecticides should be kept out of reach from your pets and instructions for use and when pets can be allowed back onto the lawn should be adhered to strictly," Nelson said. "Also beware of some mulches that contain parts of the cocoa bean, which can be toxic to dogs if ingested."

Many pets also see their allergies peak during this season as well. This can lead to itchy skin, sneezing and watery eyes. Nelson said to check with your veterinarian about products to help pets with seasonal allergies.

A grassy lawn can even be problematic for dogs. Nelson said grass produces grass seeds, or awns, which often get caught up in a dog's coat, ear canals or between the toes, and can migrate a great distance in the body and cause serious infections. She said to check your dog's body and feet daily for these annoying, and possibly deadly, pieces of plant material.

Thunderstorms can be traumatic for many dogs. Nelson said there are several nonprescription options to treat mild anxiety caused by thunder and other loud noises. But she said if your dog has severe phobias, speak to your veterinarian about prescription medications to help alleviate its

anxiety.

Another key safety tip is making sure your pet is properly identified with a tag and collar and a microchip to ensure, if lost, it will be returned to you.

"Even if your pet is kept indoors or not prone to wandering, proper identification is always a good idea as there are many reasons why a pet can become lost or displaced," Nelson said.

Access to fresh water and shade this time of year is a must, Nelson said. Food should be changed out at least twice daily, especially if left outside, as it will spoil more quickly and attract flies and other insects as well. Weak, debilitated animals should not be left outside as wounds and soiling of the skin with urine and feces can lead to maggot infestations.

"Also be aware that very young and old animals cannot tolerate the extreme temperatures very well, so special care should be taken with them during periods of higher temperatures," Nelson said.

Provided by Kansas State University

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