

Veterinarian says winter preparation important for pets, too

11 December 2015, by Taylor Manges

While you are busy prepping your house and car for winter, a Kansas State University veterinarian says don't forget about the pets, too.

"As temperatures start to drop, it's important to help pets transition into winter," said Susan Nelson, clinical associate professor of clinical sciences at the university's Veterinary Health Center.

One of the most important things to remember if you have outdoor pets is that they have adequate shelter, water and extra food, Nelson said. Appropriate shelter can be housing that is big enough for your [pet](#) to move around in, but not so big that it is going to lose heat. Shelters also should face toward the south or west and have a thick blanket or tarp to block the wind.

"Use clean straw or cedar shavings in shelters instead of towels and blankets to give animals something to nestle in, which helps to insulate them from the cold," Nelson said. "Towels and blankets get trampled down, making them ineffective at conserving heat."

Outdoor pets also will need a reliable water supply. Nelson said switch the metal water bowl for a plastic or heated one so your pet's tongue doesn't get stuck to a frozen bowl.

"Make sure you are going out frequently to change the water," Nelson said. "Animals can dehydrate just as quickly in the winter as they can in the summer if they don't have access to fresh water."

Along with plenty of water, animals will need to consume extra food.

"The extra calories will help your pet keep itself warm," Nelson said.

If your indoor pet will be spending time outdoors or going on walks, consider investing in a

coat—especially for shorthaired dogs—and snow boots.

"The boots will not only protect a dog's feet from sharp pieces of ice, but they also protect its feet from ice melt," Nelson said. "Ice melt is very irritating to dogs' feet. If your dog ingests [ice melt](#) from licking its paws, it can cause vomiting and diarrhea." To avoid this, simply wipe down their feet and underside with a wet towel after a walk.

To avoid accidental poisonings during the winter, don't let your pet drink from street puddles, as they could contain antifreeze. According to Nelson, even a small amount of antifreeze can be deadly to pets, so she suggests using "pet-friendly" antifreeze.

Another common source of poisoning is [rat poison](#).

"Rat poisons are more common in households this time of year because rats move indoors," Nelson said. "Consider using traps instead, as some dogs like the flavor of the rat poison and might be tempted to eat it. Cats more commonly get secondary poisoning from eating dead rats that have ingested the poison."

Nelson offers these tips for your pet's safety when temperatures dip below freezing:

- As a general rule, if it's below freezing, don't leave your pet outside any longer than you would be yourself. "We often see increased cases of frostbite on pets' noses, ears and pads of their feet if they are left outside too long," Nelson said.
- Very young and very old animals cannot regulate their body temperature as easily as a mature, healthy animal, which makes it easier for them to develop hypothermia.
- Never leave your pets unattended in a vehicle during the winter months, as it can be just as deadly as the summer. "An enclosed vehicle can be similar to a freezer,

and temperatures can drop very low,"
Nelson said.

- Outdoor cats often use heat from car engines to stay warm. Honk your horn or bang on the hood of your vehicle before leaving in the mornings to scare them away.

Additionally, it is just as important to have an emergency bag ready for your pet in case of power outages or ice storms. Emergency bags should contain a few days' worth of food, water and medication for your pet.

Provided by Kansas State University

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