

Preventing Heatstroke in Dogs

We're all pleased when the sunshine makes an appearance and the summer starts to warm up. Our dogs enjoy it too - more enjoyable walks in the park and swimming in the river... but travelling or being left in the car can be less fun.



If a dog is left in the car it can cause problems and it does not need to be a very hot day, midday or afternoon sun or even being left for long periods. Car windows amplify the temperature outside and it quickly becomes very hot, even in the morning sun or in spring or autumn. Leaving car windows open partly helps to circulate some air but will only reduce, not prevent, the car heating up. On warm days or when dogs are left for more than 15-20 minutes leaving windows open is not enough to keep them cool.

In the UK it's often easy for dogs to stay cool outside on a normal day, even when exercising, by panting, or seeking shade. However, if it is warm, the dog is not used to the exercise, or he is working very hard, then they can easily overheat. This is an even bigger problem for dogs that live in warmer climates.

Heat stroke, also known as hyperthermia is when the internal body temperature gets too hot (above 105oF). Signs include heavy panting and hyperventilation (deep, fast breathing). Dogs have increased salivation (slobbering) early on and then dry gums, weakness and confusion as heat stroke progresses. Vomiting and diarrhea and sometimes bleeding can be seen, finally leading to seizures and coma.

How to prevent it:

- Ensure that dogs kept outdoors have plenty of water and shade.
- Restrict outdoor exercise to the early morning or evening when it is cooler.
- Keep your dog well hydrated, carry water when you walk (freezing a bottle and letting it melt though the day is a good idea if you have it in the car)
- Get used to your dog's normal breathing so that you can spot changes as he gets warm.
- Only do steady exercise on hot days, allow dog to get used to the exercise as the weather warms up rather than doing a lot of running on the first warm day. The best time of day to exercise a dog is in the early morning or the evening if it is warm.
- Never leave in dog unattended in a car in direct sunshine, or anywhere on a warm day.
- Window shades are useful if driving with our dog in the car.

What to do if your dog gets too warm or you suspect heat stroke:

- Cool the dog gently with tepid or cool water; don't use cold water if you can help it.
- Ice packs can be used gently over areas with good circulation e.g. "armpits", groin or neck. (Be sure to wrap the pack in something and use in 5 minute bursts so as not to cool too quickly or cause frostbite).
- Go to your vet immediately if you think your dog could be suffering from heatstroke. You can use the methods above to help while you organise transport to the vets. Heatstroke can cause delayed complications that are very serious, including death and this is why medical attention must be sought immediately.

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