

Summer Care Tips for You and Your Pets

Summer is a time for both you and your pet to enjoy the sunshine and outdoors, but along with the fun, the season also offers up situations that can endanger your pet. By taking precautions, you can decrease the chance that disaster will happen.

- In nice weather you may be tempted to take your pet with you in the car while you travel or do errands. During warm weather, the inside of your car can reach 120° in a matter of minutes, even if you're parked in the shade. This can mean real trouble for your companion animals left in the car. Dogs and cats can't perspire and can only dispel heat by panting and through the pads of their feet. Pets who are left in hot cars even briefly can suffer from heat exhaustion, heat stroke, brain damage, and can even die. Don't think that just because you'll be gone "just a minute" that your pet will be safe while you're gone. To avoid any chance that your pet will succumb to the heat of a car this summer, be sure to play it safe by leaving your pet cool and refreshed at home while you're on the road. And if you do happen to see a pet in a car alone during the hot summer months, alert the management of the store where the car is parked. If the owner does not return promptly, call local animal control or the police department immediately.
- It is very dangerous, and in some states illegal, to drive with a dog in the back of a pick-up truck. Not only can flying debris cause serious injury, but a dog may be unintentionally thrown into traffic if the driver suddenly hits the brakes, swerves, or is hit by another car. Dogs should ride either in the cab (in a crate or wearing a seat belt harness designed for dogs) or in a secured crate in the bed of the truck.
- Summer is often a time when people fertilize their lawns and work in their gardens. But beware: Plant food, fertilizer, and insecticides can be fatal if your pet ingests them. In addition, more than 700 plants can produce physiologically active or toxic substances in sufficient amounts to cause harmful effects in animals. For more information, see the HSUS list of dangerous plants.
- With people and dogs spending more time outside, dog bites are likely to increase in the summer months. Spaying or neutering your dog reduces the likelihood that he will bite and provides many other health benefits.
- Make sure your pet is always wearing a collar and identification tag. If you are separated from your pet, an ID tag may very well be his or her ticket home.
- Check with your veterinarian to see if your pets should be taking heartworm prevention medication. Heartworm disease, which is transmitted by mosquitoes, can be fatal in both dogs and cats.

- Pets and pools can equal disaster. Prevent free access to pools and always supervise a pet in a pool.

- Provide plenty of water and shade for your pets while they're enjoying the great outdoors so they can stay cool.

- If you plan on traveling with your pet during the summer, take the time to prepare for your furry friends in advance. Many airlines have summer pet embargoes, and most trains and ships do not allow pets other than service animals. The HSUS has information on traveling with your pet that may make the difference between a pleasant trip and a vacation nightmare.

- Pets need exercise even when it is hot, but extra care needs to be taken with older dogs, short-nosed dogs, and those with thick coats. On very hot days, limit exercise to early morning or evening hours. Keep in mind that asphalt gets very hot and can burn your pet's paws.

- Another summertime threat is fleas and ticks. Use only flea and tick treatments recommended by your veterinarian. Some over-the-counter flea and tick products can be toxic, even when used according to instructions.

- Pets can get sunburned too, and your pet may require sunscreen on his or her nose and ear tips. Pets with light-colored noses or light-colored fur on their ears are particularly vulnerable to sunburn and skin cancer.

- Don't take your pets to crowded summer events such as concerts or fairs. The loud noises and crowds, combined with the heat, can be stressful and dangerous for pets. For your pet's well being, leave her at home. Be especially aware of these threats during holidays, such as the Fourth of July.

- In summer heat your pet can suffer from heat exhaustion and heat stroke. These conditions are very serious and could cause your pet to die. You should be aware of the signs of heat stress, which could include heavy panting, glazed eyes, a rapid pulse, unsteadiness, a staggering gait, vomiting, or a deep red or purple tongue. If your pet does become overheated, you need to immediately lower his body temperature. Move your pet into the shade and apply cool (not cold) water over his body to gradually lower his core body temperature. Apply cold towels or ice packs to your pet's head, neck, and chest only. Let your pet drink small amounts of water or lick ice cubes. Most importantly, get him to a veterinarian immediately.

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