

Summer's Hidden Threats for Pets

Discover the vital steps you need to take to protect your pets from the risks of heatstroke, dehydration and hot pavement as temperatures rise.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The first day of summer 2024 is right around the corner, so it's time to review warm weather safety tips for furry family members
- Keeping your pet safe during the summer months means recognizing that your dog or cat doesn't handle heat the same way you do, and staying alert for signs of overheating
- Tips for keeping pets safe in the heat include never leaving them in a parked car, keeping them off hot pavement, limiting outdoor exercise to the coolest parts of the day, providing a constant supply of clean fresh drinking water, and avoiding bodies of water with blue-green algae blooms
- If your pet is a cat and you live in the city, it's important to prevent your kitty from becoming a victim of feline high-rise syndrome

Thursday, June 20th is the first day of summer 2024, and most of us are looking forward to sunshine, warm temperatures, and outdoor activities. However, as wonderful as this time of year is, it's important to play it safe when it comes to furry family members and summer days.

"If it's too hot for you, it's too hot for them," veterinarian Dr. Peter Eeg of Maryland told WTOP News.¹

Eeg suggests walking pets early in the morning or late in the evening and avoiding midday outings. And he warns against hot pavement:

"Also, check the concrete before strolling on the sidewalk. If it's too hot, take to the grass. Take the back of your hand and put it down on the surface and leave it there for about seven to 10 seconds. If it's too hot for the back of your hand, it's too hot for your pet's feet."

Since proper hydration is extremely important during warm weather, Eeg recommends putting a little extra water in your pet's food, especially if you have an older dog or cat. And offer fresh water as often as possible, especially during walks. If your pet is exercising or hanging out with you outdoors, take water breaks every 10 to 20 minutes. He also recommends avoiding community water sources at dog parks and bringing your own water instead.

How to Recognize Signs of Overheating in Your Pet

Heatstroke, which is the ultimate and often deadly result of overheating, is caused by a dangerous elevation in an animal's body temperature. While it most often occurs in dogs left in cars during the summer months, it can also happen in late spring and the first weeks of summer if a pet is exposed to high temperatures before he or she has

acclimated to the heat. Symptoms of overheating include:

- Heavy panting or rapid breathing
- Elevated body temperature
- Excessive thirst
- Weakness, collapse
- Glazed eyes
- Increased pulse and heartbeat
- Vomiting, bloody diarrhea
- Seizures
- Bright or dark red tongue, gums
- Excessive drooling
- Staggering, stumbling
- Unconsciousness

In addition to hot vehicles, other contributors to pet overheating include humid conditions, lack of drinking water, obesity, and overexertion.

Some pets are at higher risk for heat-related illness than others, including **brachycephalic breeds** (dogs and cats with flat faces and short noses), older pets, puppies and kittens, animals who are ill or have a chronic health condition, pets not used to warm weather, and any pet left outside in hot weather.

5 Tips for Keeping Your Pet Safe in the Heat

1. **Never, ever leave your pet alone in a parked car on a warm day** — Not even for a minute. On a warm day, the temperature inside your vehicle can rise quickly into the danger zone. For example, on an 85-degree day it takes only 10 minutes for the temperature inside your parked car to climb to 102 degrees. In a half hour, it can hit 120 degrees. Leaving windows cracked doesn't drop the temperature inside the vehicle. Leaving your car running with the air conditioner on is dangerous for a whole host of reasons.

Leaving a pet unattended in a vehicle in extreme heat or cold is a criminal act in several states and municipalities. Most statutes have rescue provisions that allow certain individuals, for example police officers, firefighters, animal control officers, and store employees, to do whatever is necessary to rescue an animal trapped in a vehicle in extreme temperatures.

On summer days, it's best to leave your pet home where she can stay cool, hydrated, and safe.

2. **Don't walk or exercise your pet on hot pavement** — This can be a tricky one to remember (unless you're in the habit of walking your pet barefoot), but it's extremely important. As Dr. Eeg mentioned, pavement on a hot day can burn your dog's or cat's paws, and in addition, the heat rising from concrete or asphalt can quickly overheat an animal who lives close to the ground. Don't allow your pet to stand, walk or rest on hot outdoor surfaces like sidewalks or parking lots.

3. **Exercise your pet during the coolest parts of the day** — In most locations, this means early in the morning or after sunset. Try to stay in the shade during daylight hours, and no matter the time of day, don't overdo outdoor exercise or play sessions. Even on an overcast day or in the evening, a long period of physical exertion in hot weather can cause heatstroke in your pet.

A good rule of thumb is if outdoor temps hit 90 degrees, your pet should be indoors where it's cool.

4. **Provide plenty of fresh clean drinking water at all times** — In addition to overheating, your pet can become dehydrated very rapidly in warm weather. A good general guideline is that a healthy dog should drink between ½ and 1 ounce of water per pound of body weight each day. And if she'll be outside for any length of time, she should have access to complete shade. Periodically encourage her to play in the sprinkler or gently hose her down with cool water to prevent overheating.
5. **Keep pets away from blue-green algae** — During spring and summer when the weather is warm, **blue-green algae** blooms and collects in non-moving bodies of water such as ponds, lakes, and rivers. These blooms produce toxins that are deadly to cats and dogs.

"The water may be clear, but because the toxins can still be present, it is best if pet owners don't let their pets swim in the water, especially in areas where the water is not moving, as this where blue-green algae can start growing," says Dr. Murl Bailey, senior professor at the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences Bailey.

"The first clinical signs, such as convulsions and collapse, develop as soon as the animals leave the water and pets can rapidly deteriorate before the owner can get them to the veterinarian."²

If your pet has been exposed to blue-green algae or shows any signs of poisoning after being near bodies of water, you should seek veterinary care immediately.

City Dweller With a Cat? Beware of High-Rise Syndrome

While overheating is less of a problem for cats than dogs (because kitties tend to find a nice cool napping spot on hot days), during the warmer months of the year more than a few city dwelling cats fall from open windows and fire escapes to the ground below. This is known as **Feline High-Rise Syndrome**, and it can have devastating consequences.

Well-intentioned cat guardians who live in tall buildings often allow their kitties to sun themselves in open windows and on fire escapes. It sounds safe enough, however, the feline prey drive can lead a cat to try to pounce on moving birds or insects. Falls from tall buildings often result in shattered jaws, punctured lungs, broken limbs, and even death. A few facts about High Rise Syndrome:

- When a cat falls from a high perch it's unintentional, not deliberate. Cats are smart. They don't leap from high places because they know it's dangerous.
- The reason cats fall is usually because they are intensely focused on something outside, perhaps a bird, and either lose their balance or their prey instinct sends them out the window before they realize what they're doing. Another cause of falls is normal muscle twitching and other movement during deep sleep. A kitty can roll off a windowsill while changing sleep positions.

- While cats won't intentionally jump from a high perch, they also don't realize they can't dig their claws into brick, concrete or steel surfaces to help prevent a fall if they lose their balance.
- When a cat falls from a high perch, he doesn't land squarely on all fours. He lands with his feet slightly apart, which is how serious head and pelvic injuries occur. And falling shorter distances can actually be more dangerous, because kitty doesn't have enough time to adjust his body to land correctly.

Even if your cat survives a fall in relatively good condition, she'll land in an unfamiliar, frightening place on a sidewalk or street and can easily run away before you can get to her.

Sources and References

¹ [WTOP.com, June 4, 2023](#)

² [Texas A&M University, Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Science, March 14, 2024](#)
