ANIMAL HEALTH CLINIC

HEAT STRESS

Prevention & understanding your pet's risk

Heat stress can become life-threatening. Dogs are especially vulnerable because they primarily cool themselves by panting and cannot cool their bodies as efficiently as people do. Heat exhaustion can progress to heat stroke, which can cause serious damage to internal organs.

PREVENTION: KEEP YOUR PET SAFE

- On warm days, exercise dogs before 8 a.m. or after 7 p.m., when temperatures are generally cooler.
- Never leave your pet in a vehicle during warm weather.
- Keep fresh drinking water available at all times.
- Keep pets indoors in a cool environment. Use air conditioning or fans when needed.
- Gradually introduce your dog to exercise when the weather changes suddenly from mild to warm.
- For dogs who live outdoors, provide shade, shelter, and plenty of water.
- Maintain a healthy body condition. Overweight dogs are more prone to heat stress.
- During exercise, take frequent breaks and allow free access to water.
- Avoid exercise and time outdoors in warm weather for brachycephalic (short-nosed) dogs.

PETS AT HIGHER RISK

- Short-nosed dogs, including Bulldogs, Pugs, Boxers, and other breeds with shortened airways.
- Dogs with thick or dark coats, which can absorb and retain heat.
- Overweight dogs and dogs with heart disease or other underlying medical conditions.
- Dogs who are dehydrated, overexerted, untrained, or not acclimated to warmer weather.
- Dogs recently moved to a warmer climate or exposed to a sudden rise in temperature.
- Dogs who have experienced heat stroke in the past.

BRACHYCEPHALIC AIRWAY SYNDROME

Brachycephalic means "short head." Breeds such as Pugs, Boston Terriers, French Bulldogs, Pekingese, Boxers, English Bulldogs, and Shih Tzu may have airway changes that make breathing and panting less efficient.

- These dogs may have difficulty cooling themselves through panting.
- English Bulldogs are especially susceptible and should not exercise or be active in the heat.
- Brachycephalic dogs can have increased anesthetic risks.
- Surgery may help some clinically affected dogs, but not every dog needs or benefits from surgery.

WHAT ABOUT CATS?

Cats are less commonly affected by heat stress injury than dogs, but they can still overheat. Keep cats in a cool, well-ventilated space and make sure fresh water is always available.

Turn the page for warning signs and what to do if you suspect heat stroke.

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HEAT EXHAUSTION & HEAT STROKE

Know the warning signs and act quickly

NORMAL BODY TEMPERATURE	100.5–102.5°F in dogs and cats	**HEAT STROKE**	A dog's body temperature of 105°F or higher is consistent with heat stroke.

HEAT EXHAUSTION

Heat exhaustion occurs when the body is exposed to excessive heat, especially during exercise in warm temperatures.

Common signs include:

- Excessive panting.
- Drinking unusually large amounts of water.

HEAT STROKE: WARNING SIGNS

Heat stroke can develop when a dog cannot get rid of excess body heat. Signs may include:

- Restlessness or agitation.
- Heavy drooling or thick saliva.
- Bright red tongue or gums.
- Weakness, disorientation, or collapse.
- Vomiting or diarrhea.
- Racing pulse.
- Limbs that feel warm or hot to the touch.
- Very high body temperature.

FIRST AID: WHAT TO DO IF YOUR DOG IS OVERHEATING

1. **Move your dog out of the heat.** Get them out of direct sunlight and into an air-conditioned building or vehicle. Keep them as calm as possible.

2. **Begin gentle cooling.** Gently spray or apply cool or tepid water to the dog. Cool, wet towels may be placed over the chest, abdomen, between the legs, and around the neck.

3. **Use airflow.** A fan can help with cooling. Monitor your pet closely when using electrical devices around water.

4. **Offer water carefully.** Encourage your dog to drink, but do not force water into their mouth.

5. **Do not use ice or ice water.** Ice water, ice baths, or applying ice can cause blood vessels to constrict and may interfere with cooling.

6. **Get veterinary care immediately.** Heat stroke can cause widespread internal-organ damage. Transport your dog to a veterinary hospital as soon as possible, even if they seem to improve.

IMPORTANT: COOLING AND VETERINARY CARE

The source guidance recommends monitoring rectal temperature every 2–3 minutes during active cooling and stopping active cooling when the temperature reaches 103–104°F, because an overheated animal can become too cold. Only attempt rectal temperature monitoring if it can be done safely without delaying transport or veterinary care.

A pet who has suffered heat stroke may develop complications hours to days later and may have difficulty regulating body temperature. Prompt veterinary evaluation and supportive care are essential.

SUSPECT HEAT STROKE? THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.

Contact a veterinary hospital and begin transport right away. Do not wait for symptoms to worsen or for your pet to cool completely before seeking care.

Questions or concerns about your pet’s risk for heat stress? Contact Animal Health Clinic for guidance. If you suspect heat stroke, seek emergency veterinary care immediately.

Educational handout adapted from the supplied “Heat Stress Injury Prevention and Care” brochure. This handout is not a substitute for prompt veterinary assessment or emergency treatment.