Winter Safety for Outdoor Dogs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

As the crisp autumn winds grow cold here in northern Wisconsin, we prepare for the changing seasons by taking our sweaters, coats and scarves out of storage. Although outdoor pets develop thicker coats, they still require your intervention to keep them safe and warm during winter. If you live in a cold weather climate and plan to keep your dog outdoors even part of the time, be aware of the following winter challenges:

Proper outdoor housing

Your dog needs a warm, dry home if he is going to spend any length of time outdoors during winter. Appropriate doghouses are well insulated and just large enough so your dog can stand up, turn around and comfortably lie down. Anything larger is more difficult to keep warm and allows greater loss of body heat.

For additional warmth, use old blankets as bedding material. Blankets are ideal since they're easy to remove and wash for a clean and dry environment all winter long. Even dogs that are kept partially outdoors in kennels require protection from biting winds. Provide a doghouse or secure a tarp or burlap onto a portion of the kennel to create a windbreak.

Walking in the cold

Sidewalk ice melters like salt, magnesium, or calcium chloride can cause irritation to paws and are toxic when ingested causing stomach upsets, and if enough is ingested, nerve damage. To prevent salt from hurting your pet's feet, we

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recommend using dog boots and a nontoxic ice melter for your own sidewalk. If your pet has walked on a salty area, wipe off his paws with a moist towel.

Snowballs can be fun unless they are between the toes. Snow collecting between the toes of dogs can be very painful, and if large enough, obstruct blood flow to the toes. Help your pet remove these collections of snow while you are out walking. Dog boots will help eliminate this problem.

Thin ice on lakes is hazardous for people and animals. Keep your pet away from lakes or other bodies of water which may have thin ice.

In the northern United States, remember that snowmobile trails can be dangerous places. Be sure to keep your pets off of the trails.

Ice on walks is not only dangerous for us two-legged creatures, but for our four-legged friends as well. Slipping on the ice is of special concern for older dogs who may already be stiff due to arthritis.

Veterinary Perspective...

Dogs' footpads can be injured by harsh salt or sharp snow crusts. Instead of using ice melters like salt, magnesium, or calcium chloride, which irritate paws and are toxic when ingested, we recommend using a nontoxic ice melter.If your pet has walked on a salty area outside of your property, make sure to wipe off his paws with a moist towel and wait for them to dry before he goes out again.

Keeping warm

Speaking of arthritis, as in people, cold can increase the discomfort of arthritis. Providing an orthopedic bed in a warm part of the house, using a dog sweater, and providing some indoor exercise can help arthritic pets be more comfortable.

During the cold winter months, many people use space heaters and woodburning stoves. Do not allow unsupervised pets in areas with space heaters which could be bumped over by the pet. Placing Scat mats on the floor may also be helpful in keeping pets away from stoves and heaters.

Antifreeze

Antifreeze should be out of pet's reach. Antifreeze, which contains ethylene glycol, is extremely poisonous; a few teaspoons can be lethal. Its sweet taste attracts pets and ingesting even a tiny amount causes fatal kidney toxicity. So, when tuning up your car for that holiday trip, make sure your pet does not have access to antifreeze containers and clean up any spills immediately. If you think your pet has consumed antifreeze, contact your veterinarian immediately. Time is of the essence.

Nutrition

Nutritional needs of your outdoor dog change with the seasons. Outdoor dogs require extra calories to generate enough body heat to keep warm during winter. This increase in calories can

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be as much as 30%, depending on the pet and housing conditions. Provide more food during winter accordingly. It is also important to provide fresh, unfrozen water at all times. Dogs cannot eat snow as a source of water so water bowls need to be checked regularly or consider a heated water bowl to maintain a source of unfrozen drinking water.

Grooming and routine inspections

A dog's coat tends to mat and tangle more during winter. Fur that is matted and ungroomed is less able to retain heat and cannot adequately protect your dog from the elements. Harsh winter conditions can dry your dog's coat and skin. Vitacoat® Plus is an excellent supplement, formulated to help build soft coats and healthy skin. Regular brushing also helps stimulate natural oil production to maintain a healthy protective layer.

Be sure to check and clean paws regularly since compacted snow or ice lodged between paw pads can lead to painful sores or frostbite. Perfect Coat Bath Wipes are perfect for between baths or to clean muddy paws. They also come in handy to wipe off salts and other chemical de-icers that burn and irritate paws and gently clean and condition your pet's skin at the same time.

If you have any doubts whether it is too cold to keep your dog outdoors, err on the side of caution and keep him indoors. Shivering is a clear sign that your dog is too cold and indicates the potential onset of hypothermia. Bring your dog indoors if he is shivering. Pay particular attention to older dogs as well as puppies. Older dogs will have special health considerations to address, especially arthritis. The cold can aggravate arthritic conditions and icy ground poses real dangers. Whenever possible, keep older dogs indoors.

Follow these guidelines, and enjoy a safe and happy winter season with your dog.

Winter-smart products WARM and PROTECT your pet outdoors...

Insulated Doghouses

Heated Water Bowls

Protective Footwear

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