

Frostbite Symptoms, Treatment, and Prevention

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Frostbite, the injury or death of tissue from prolonged exposure to freezing or subfreezing temperatures, poses a significant wintertime threat for all dogs.

Frostbite most commonly affects the tips of the ears, the tail, the scrotum, and the toes. Normally, blood flow keeps these areas warm. However, when a body area becomes extremely cold, its local blood vessels constrict to help the body conserve heat. The tissues then have even less blood supply and can eventually become as cold as the surrounding air. If the tissue freezes, it dies.

IS YOUR DOG AT RISK?

Dogs housed outdoors are extremely susceptible to frostbite. They absolutely require warm, dry [housing](#). Indoor dogs – especially small and/or short-haired dogs – are also at risk. Certain medications and medical conditions can increase susceptibility to frostbite. Protect your pet from frostbite with warm pet [clothing](#) and [boots](#). Plus, shelter her from the wind.

FROSTBITE SYMPTOMS

Frostbitten tissue may initially appear pale or gray, as well as hard and cold. As the area thaws, it may turn red. Thawing is very painful. If frostbite is severe, tissue will eventually turn black and slough off.

VETERINARY TREATMENT

Your veterinarian will examine and treat your pet for hypothermia which may include warmed intravenous fluids and warm water enemas to raise her core body temperature. Total tissue damage may not be evident for several days. Your veterinarian may prescribe pain relief medication and [antibiotics](#). Severe frostbite may necessitate amputation. Prevent pain and suffering this winter; keep your pet warm, dry, and safe from frostbite.

IMMEDIATE TREATMENT

treat frostbite with extreme care

- NEVER rub or massage frostbitten tissue.
- Contact your veterinarian for an immediate examination. Wrap your pet in a warm towel or blanket before transporting her.
- Do NOT warm a frostbitten area if you cannot keep it warm.
- Do not give pain medication.