

Winter Safety for Dogs and Cats

Winter is upon us and this season of snow and ice brings unbearably cold temperatures that put your four-legged family members at risk for harmful conditions like frostbite and hypothermia. Here are some common sense tips to keep your pets warm, safe and healthy this winter:

- Keep your pets inside whenever temperatures hover around freezing. In particular, dogs that are older or have a chronic illness may be particularly sensitive to the cold so take them outdoors only long enough to relieve themselves. Cats can live indoors all winter!
- Cats that are allowed outdoors sometimes choose to sleep under the hoods of cars, where it is warmer. When the motor is started, the cat can be injured or killed. To prevent this, tap loudly on the hood of your car and wait a few seconds before starting the engine. This will give the cat a chance to escape and be brought indoors.
- Always keep your dog on-leash and be sure he is wearing an ID tag when walking in the extreme cold or wind or in a snowstorm. Dogs can easily lose their sense of smell in these kinds of conditions and become lost.
- Consider keeping a towel handy at the door to wipe off your pet's paws, legs and belly when coming in from a walk on the road. Chemicals like road salt and antifreeze can build up on their feet and become hazardous when they lick themselves. Consider getting specially made pet boots if you are outside frequently with your furry friend in the winter. Keep nails and hair on feet and between toes trimmed to prevent accumulation of ice and chemicals. Be sure to clean up any antifreeze spills in the garage or driveway and consider using animal-friendly products to keep your yard free of ice.
- Give special considerations to grooming in the winter. If possible, you may want to keep a slightly longer hairstyle on your animal friend. After bathing your pet, be sure he's completely dry before letting him outdoors. If you have a short-haired breed, consider a sweater or jacket for him when going outside and choose one that covers him generously.
- Your pet - dog or cat – deserves a warm place to sleep that's inside away from drafts and outdoor elements and includes a pillow or blanket.
- Active dogs may need a little more food and water in the winter. Increased protein may help your dog stay strong and his coat stay healthy and shiny.
- ***Above all, never leave your dog or cat alone in a car during cold weather.*** A car is like a refrigerator or freezer in the winter, holding in the cold. Your companion animal can freeze to death in a matter of minutes. If he cannot accompany you to your final destination, leave him safely at home or with a reliable dog sitter or kennel.

Probably the best prescription for winter's woes is to keep your dog or cat inside with you and your family as much as possible. The happiest dogs are those who are taken out frequently for walks and exercise, but kept inside the rest of the time with the comfort and love of family members! Enjoy the winter and do it safely!

(Adapted from American Veterinary Medical Association www.amva.org)