

7 TIPS TO KEEP YOUR PET SAFE in the Dog Days of Summer

by Lisa A. Beach

Warm, summer weather gives you more chances to hang outside with your pet, whether you're playing fetch at the park, swimming in the pool, or going for a jog together. However, the heat and the humidity pose some special dangers for your pet during the summer, including heat stroke, sunburn, dehydration, and burned paw pads.

So how can you keep your pet safe in the Texas heat this summer? Follow these safety tips:

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- Dr. Brian Benjamin, Ohio Drive Animal Hospital

1 WATCH OUT FOR HOT VEHICLES! Never leave your pet unattended inside a parked car, not even for "just a few minutes." On an 85-degree day, even with the window cracked open, temperatures inside a car can soar to over 120 degrees in under 10 minutes according to the SPCA of Texas. "This quickly boosts your pet's body temperature, which can lead to heatstroke or even death," explains Dr. Brian Benjamin of Ohio Drive Animal Hospital in Plano.

2 PROVIDE UNLIMITED ACCESS TO FRESH, COLD WATER. Pets can quickly become dehydrated, especially when it's hot outside. Make sure your pet can get a drink of fresh water, both inside and outside. *Tip: Add a few ice cubes to the bowl to keep the water cold.*



4 EXERCISE DURING COOLER HOURS. When you take your pet for a walk, Dr. Benjamin suggests going early in the morning or close to sundown when the temperature isn't at its peak. "Also, bringing water makes a huge difference in helping your pet keep himself cool," he says.

5 WALK YOUR PETS ON DIRT OR GRASS. Sensitive paw pads can quickly burn with prolonged exposure to a hot surface, such as sidewalks or an asphalt parking lot. To avoid injury, don't let your pet linger on hot surfaces when you take him for a walk. "Lots of dogs come into our hospital with blisters on their paw pads," says Dr. Benjamin. "I see this a lot in dogs who don't go outside very often. But if you take them frequently, the bottoms of their paws should get callouses, which toughen them up so they can withstand extreme temperatures a bit better."

6 APPLY A PET-FRIENDLY SUNSCREEN. Just like humans, dogs with thin or light-colored coats can get sunburn, especially on their ears and noses. Dr. Benjamin adds that, in addition to sunburn, this puts pets at increased risk for certain types of cancer. His advice? "Put sunscreen on your dog if he has a thin or light-colored coat and is going to be outside for an extended period of time. Whatever sunscreen you'd put on a baby would be gentle enough for your pet."

7 WATCH OUT FOR SUMMER PET MYTHS. If you think you should shave your dog this summer to keep him cool, think again. "It's a myth that grooming dogs, especially shaving them, keeps them cool," explains Dr. Benjamin. "Unlike people, dogs don't cool themselves through their skin, but through panting. Leaving the fur longer acts like an insulator."



3 MAKE SURE YOUR PET HAS A SHADY RETREAT outside when the sun blazes overhead. If you don't have a porch, overhang, or tree, "a doghouse could work as long as it has good airflow," points out Dr. Benjamin. "But if you can't provide a shady escape from the sun, don't leave your pet out for more than a few minutes."

WARNING SIGNS OF HEATSTROKE

If your pet can't stand up or collapses, is panting, disoriented, vomiting, has diarrhea, or is having seizures, contact your veterinarian immediately. Speed and quality of treatment can make the difference between life and death. Source: Dr. Brian Benjamin of Ohio Drive Animal Hospital in Plano.

The SPCA of Texas receives an average of eight calls a day reporting suspected animal cruelty, with almost half of those reports involving animals being denied food, water, and/or shelter.

To report animal cruelty, please visit spca.org/abuse or call 214-461-1850.