

HOW TO PREVENT CANINE HEAT EXHAUSTION

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MANHATTAN -- It's not just the canine athletes -- the Frisbee leapers, the runners and jumpers -- that are susceptible to heat exhaustion. Every dog is a potential victim of summer's heat.

One of the most common causes of heat stroke is leaving an animal in a hot car.

"Even on an 80 degree day, the temperature inside a car can get up to 130 degrees fairly quickly," said William Fortney, assistant professor of diagnostic medicine pathobiology at Kansas State University. "Leaving a window cracked doesn't prevent heat build-up."

Fortney said leaving a dog in a car on a warm day is risking the dog's life.

"Dogs don't sweat, and they don't have an efficient way to cool themselves down," he said. "If they are panting, it may be because they need the oxygen because they've been exercising, or it may mean they are trying to get rid of built-up heat in their bodies."

Contrary to popular belief, long hair coats do not provide insulation from the sun or summer heat. Long coats actually hold in body heat.

"If you don't believe that, try wearing a down coat in the summer," Fortney said.

Clipping the dog's coat a little shorter for summer will help to keep the dog cooler, Fortney said.

"Be sure not to shave the dog, though, because that could lead to sunburn, which would be very painful for the dog," he said.

Black dogs absorb the sun's rays, so they get hot more quickly than lighter-colored dogs.

Fortney said it is impossible to give specific recommendations on how long dogs can be out in the sun exercising.

"There are so many variables, depending on the physical condition of the dog, its age, its coat length, its breed," he said. "A well-conditioned dog with short hair can play longer in the heat than a long-coated dog not accustomed to getting much exercise. The owner also must take into account the age of the dog and any health problems it might have. Very young or very old dogs are more at risk. Breeds like pugs, English bulldogs, and Pekinese have more difficulty in the heat because of their facial shape and poor physical design of their respiratory system."

The first signs of heat exhaustion:

- * Excessive panting
- * The skin on the inside of the ears becomes flushed and red

Fortney said heat exhaustion quickly deteriorates into heat stroke. The following are some signs of heat stroke:

- * Weakness

* Walk becomes wobbly

* Fainting/loss of consciousness

"Your quick action can save your dog's life," Fortney said. "If your dog starts getting weak and wobbly, faints and loses consciousness, cool him down as fast as possible -- don't wait to get to the veterinarian's office. Those few minutes could mean the difference between life and death. Hose the dog down with cool water. Apply an ice pack to the dog's head -- a cooler with ice can come in handy -- just place ice inside a towel or other fabric before applying the ice."

Fortney said that many dogs don't know when to quit exercising. They love playing Frisbee or fetch so much that they will continue to the point of exhaustion. It is up to the owner to use good judgment and decide when play should stop.

"I discourage that kind of activity in the heat of the day anyway," Fortney said. "Wait until the evening when it is cooler."