

Winter Tips for Pet Safety

Here are some tips to help make sure that your dog or cat stays healthy and comfortable during the winter months.

1. Keep pets away from antifreeze solution, and promptly clean up any antifreeze spills. Antifreeze is attractive to pets but is deadly, even in very small amounts.

2. Do not leave your pets outdoors unattended when the temperature gets below freezing. Pets that are mostly indoors need time to adapt to cold temperatures. They must build up a thicker coat and get their footpads toughened for snow and ice. Pets that get too chilled can develop hypothermia or even frostbite. Ear tips are especially susceptible to frostbite.

3. Short-coated dogs (Greyhounds, Dobermans, Boxers and Boston Terriers) should not go outside without a coat or sweater in very cold weather, except to relieve themselves. Small dogs with short coats (Chihuahuas, miniature Pinschers, and miniature Dachshunds) are especially vulnerable to cold, and may not be able to tolerate any outdoor exercise in extremely cold weather.

4. Many dogs also need boots in cold weather, regardless of coat length. If your dog frequently lifts up his paws, whines or stops during its walks, it is demonstrating that its feet are uncomfortably cold. Be sure to get your dog used to wearing boots before the cold weather sets in.

5. Dogs with long fur on the bottom of their paws often develop ice balls between the pads and toes of the feet. To prevent ice balls from forming, trim the hair around your dog's feet. Apply a small amount of Vaseline, cooking oil, or PAM spray to your dog's feet before taking him for a walk in snow. The oil helps prevent ice balls from sticking. Make sure you use edible oil; most dogs will lick their paws after you apply the oil.

6. If your pet walks on salted sidewalks or streets, be sure to wash his paws after your walk. Salt is very irritating to footpads. Gently rub the bottom of the feet to remove the salt as soon as your dog is off the road.

7. Many animals are less active during the winter, and don't as many calories as in the warmer months. Reduce your pet's diet during the winter, to avoid excessive weight gain. You may wish to consult with your veterinarian about the right winter food portions for your pet.

8. Most cats prefer to spend their winter days indoors; be cautious if your cat likes being outside. Don't let it out in bitterly cold weather, and be sure it has a warm place to go if it does spend a lot of time outdoors. Cats that are left outdoors may crawl into a warm car engine to get warm, which can kill them. It's much safer to keep your cat indoors during the winter.

Source: University of Minnesota, College of Veterinary Medicine
<http://www.cvm.umn.edu/facts/petsafety/winterpettips/>