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Hot Weather Tips

When the temperature begins to climb in the Southland, don't forget that your furry friends need some extra assistance to help them stay cool and healthy. Your pets are less efficient at cooling themselves than humans. Dogs and cats can only cool their bodies by perspiring from their nose and footpads and by panting. But panting very hot air only accelerates heatstroke.

By taking some simple precautions, you can keep your pets happy and healthy when the temperature soars.

Moderately warm temperatures outside can quickly lead to deadly temperatures inside a closed car. Even with the vehicle windows left slightly open, an outside temperature of 85 degrees can cause a temperature of 102 degrees inside a vehicle within 10 minutes, and 120 degrees within half of an hour. Brain damage, heatstroke, suffocation or kidney failure can occur in a healthy dog in as few as 20 minutes.

Reserve playtime for the cool of the early morning or evening, but never after a meal or when the weather is humid.

When the temperature is very high, don't let your dog stand on hot asphalt. Paw pads can easily blister and burn. Keep walks during these times to a minimum.

If possible, keep your dog or cat inside during the heat of the day to rest in a cool part of the house. Areas with tile floors are generally the coolest. Provide plenty of fresh water for all of your animals and move pet beds to shady areas, both indoors and out.

Be especially sensitive to senior and overweight cats and dogs in hot weather. Short muzzled dogs such as bulldogs, mastiffs, pugs, Boston terriers, Lhasa apsos and shih tzus, as well as those with heart or lung diseases, have more difficulty breathing during hot, humid days and should be kept cool in air-conditioned rooms as much as possible.

Don't shave your pets thinking that it will keep them cooler. Their fur protects them against sunburn and helps prevent overheating. Cats should be brushed often.

When pets do go outside, protect against sunburn by rubbing hypo-allergenic sunscreen on sensitive areas like the belly and ear tips. Light colored noses or ears are especially susceptible to sunburn and skin cancer. Do not apply any sunscreen to your pet that is not labeled specifically for use on animals.

Be aware of the signs of heat stress in your pets which include heavy panting, glazed eyes, rapid pulse, unsteadiness, staggering gait, vomiting or a deep red or purple tongue.

If you do notice signs of heat stress, immediately:

Lower your pet's body temperature by moving the animal to the shade and applying cool (not cold) water over its body to gradually lower body temperature. Apply ice packs or cold towels only to a pet's head, neck and chest or have pets drink small amounts of cool water or lick ice cubes. This is a medical emergency-take your pet to a veterinarian as soon as possible.