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Hot Dogs and Cool Kitties Pet Care Tips for Summer

We all look forward to summer sunshine, but it calls for special precautions if you have a dog or cat. Here are just a few hot weather tips for pet lovers:

- It's tempting to take your pet along while you run errands, but even if you park in the shade and leave windows open, the temperature inside your vehicle can reach 120° in minutes on a warm day. Overheating can lead to heat stroke, brain damage and death. When possible, leave your furry friends at home where it's cooler.
- It's dangerous, and in some states illegal, to let your dog ride loose in the back of a pickup truck. Also, a truck bed that's been standing in the hot sun can burn skin right off. A good rule of thumb is, if it's too hot for your bare feet, it's too hot for your dog's footpads. Make sure your dog rides in a secured crate or in the truck cab.
- Summertime is flea and tick time. Ask your veterinarian to recommend a repellent, even if you plan to use an over-the-counter product. Some can be toxic.
- Heartworm disease is transmitted by mosquitoes. It can be fatal to both dogs and cats, so ask your veterinarian about preventive medicines.
- Pets with white coats or pink skin may be especially vulnerable to sunburn on noses and the tips of their ears. Avoid prolonged sun exposure, especially in the middle of the day. And check out the sunscreen products made specifically for pets.
- Dogs and cats don't perspire except around their paws. They disperse body heat by panting. High humidity can make this very difficult, so be especially careful not to overexert your pet on hot, humid days.
- Limit exercise to early morning and evening hours. Dogs need exercise year 'round, but take extra care with older dogs, very young dogs, overweight dogs and dogs with thick coats.
- Make frequent water breaks a part of your summertime exercise routine. Carry a water bottle if you venture from home. Check your pet store for collapsible bowls and water bottles designed for especially for pets.
- Never let your pet drink from a puddle in the street. It can contain antifreeze and other chemicals. Antifreeze has a sweet taste pets love, but it's toxic.
- How hot is too hot? Slip off your shoes and check. If the sidewalk is too hot for your bare feet, then it is too hot for your pet's footpads.
- Signs of heat stress are:
 - heavy panting
 - glazed eyes
 - anxious expression
 - refusal to obey commands
 - rapid pulse
 - unsteady, staggering gait
 - vomiting
 - purple tongue

If your pet becomes overheated, it is a true medical emergency. Take charge. Move your pet to the shade immediately and apply cool (not cold) water in order to lower core body temperature. Let your pet drink small amounts of water or lick ice cubes. Even if you succeed in cooling the animal, relapses are common. You must still get your pet to the veterinarian immediately to prevent shock, organ damage and brain damage.

- A small wading pool can be a great place for a dog to cool off. Keep it in the shade (hot water won't help) and change the water frequently to discourage mosquito larvae. Just two or three inches of water may be adequate. Make sure your small dog can get in and out easily.
- If your dog swims in your pool, supervise him at all times. And make sure he knows how to exit. If there are no steps or shallow areas, make sure the pool is fenced off to keep your dog from falling in. Sadly, many dogs drown each year, not because they couldn't swim, but because they jumped in but couldn't get out again.
- Provide cool, clean, fresh water in a weighted bowl repeatedly throughout the day. For an outdoor dog, it's a good idea to offer two bowls in different locations, in case one is overturned.
- Wash and disinfect water bowls frequently in the summer. Heat and humidity create the perfect breeding ground for algae.
- Keep your pet groomed so that its hair can do what it was meant to do—insulate from the heat. Mats and tangles trap heat, so you may want to clip your pet's hair in the summer. But don't shave it off completely. Hair is your pet's first line of defense against sunburn.
- Take advantage of all the new products designed to keep your pet cool, such as automatic water dispensers that attach directly to faucets, misting fans, thermal dog houses, and gel-filled beds, jackets and bandanas that stay cool for hours. There are even booties to protect your dog's feet from hot pavement.

Have a great summer!