

# Heat Stroke in Dogs

Heat stroke in dogs is a very serious condition that requires **IMMEDIATE** medical attention. Once the signs of heat stroke are detected, there is very little time before serious damage, or even death, can occur.

Dogs do not sweat through their skin like humans – they release heat primarily by panting and sweating through the pads of the feet. If a dog cannot effectively expel heat, the internal body temperature begins to rise. A dog's normal body temperature is 101.5°F (+/- 1°F) and any time the body temperature is above 104°F, action is required. Once the temperature is higher than 105°F, a true emergency exists.



## Signs of Heat Stroke

- Increased rectal temperature above 104°F
- Excessive and/or vigorous panting
- Thick saliva and drooling excessively
- Dizziness or disorientation
- Restlessness and/or appearing distressed
- Dark red gums or blue/purple gums (due to inadequate oxygenation)
- Tacky or dry gums
- Lying down and unwilling (or unable) to get up
- Collapse and/or loss of consciousness

## What to do

- Remove the dog out of the heat and away from the sun immediately and to a shaded and cool environment.
- Offer the dog cool water if it is interested in drinking but do not force water into the dog's mouth.
- If possible, determine the rectal temperature and monitor it while cooling.
- If the body temperature is above 104°F, begin cooling by using a water hose or placing cool, wet towels on the body, especially the back of the neck/around the head, in the armpits, groin area, ear flaps and paws. Do not leave towels on the dog – remove them, re-wet and place back on the dog repeatedly. Directing a fan on these wetted areas will help speed evaporative cooling.
- Transport to the closest veterinary facility immediately! Be sure to turn the air conditioning on or leave the windows open during the drive to the veterinary facility. Even if your dog seems better and there are no obvious signs of a problem, internal damage may still be present so an exam is necessary and further testing and treatment may be recommended.

## What NOT to do

- **DO NOT USE** very cold water or ice for cooling. Extreme cold can cause the blood vessels to constrict, preventing the body's core from cooling and actually cause the internal body temperature to further rise initially. This can also eventually cause hypothermia, introducing a host of new problems.
- **DO NOT** overcool the dog. Once you get the body temperature down to 103°F, **STOP** cooling efforts.
- **DO NOT** leave your pet unattended for any length of time.

## Prevention

- **NEVER** leave your dog alone in the car on a warm day, regardless of whether the windows are open. Even if weather outside is not extremely hot, the inside of your car acts like an oven – temperatures can rise to dangerously high levels in a matter of minutes.
- Avoid vigorous exercise on warm days. When outside, opt for shady areas.
- Keep fresh, cool water available at all times.
- Certain types of dogs are more sensitive to heat – especially obese, elderly, anxious, dark-coated, heavy-coated, and brachycephalic (short-nosed) breeds (such as Pugs, Pekingese, Boston Terriers, Lhasa Apso, Bulldogs, Boxers, Mastiffs, etc...). Use extreme caution when these dogs are exposed to heat. Brachycephalic breeds typically cannot effectively pant which limits their ability to cool themselves even more than the average dog.