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ACCES for Pet Health

The Animal Critical Care and Emergency Services blog provides important information to help readers stay current on the health topics most affecting their pets. Our veterinarians provide knowledge to help you give your pet a long and healthy life.

Brr! Prepare Your Pets for Cold Weather

By Christina Ryan

Brr. It's cold outside this week, and the forecast is calling for a large amount of snow. Although we have had a relatively mild winter so far this year, the next week or so the temperature outside might drop severely. Are you ready to care for your outdoor pets? Below are some quick tips to keep your pet safe and comfortable during inclement weather:

First and foremost your pet will need some sort of shelter. Make sure that it is located in a spot that can shield your pet from rain, wind and snow. You can add to the shelter by providing extra bedding, straw insulation, or a semi-enclosed area with a trapdoor that shuts behind your pet. Warning: never use space heaters or electric heat lamps. These things can be dangerous to your pet by causing burning, overheating, or by catching fire. If you need an extra heat source, there are heated beds available at some pet stores, but use caution with these items as well. Read all instructions carefully, only use them as directed, and make sure your pet will not be electrocuted if he chews on the chords.

Paws are susceptible to frostbite. To protect them, you can purchase specially made "boots" at many pet stores. If you do not cover the paws, just be aware that spending a lot of time in the snow can cause pads to crack or burn. Keep the area between the toes free of any ice balls that may form there by trimming the hair between the toes and using a warm cloth to gently remove any built-up snow.

Always have fresh water available, making sure it doesn't freeze. Licking ice or snow is not enough to hydrate your pet, and can cause a drop in overall body temperature. Heated bowls are available at many pet stores, but use the same caution with these as you would with heated bedding.

Watch out for de-icing chemicals and antifreeze. Salt applied to sidewalks and driveways can be caustic to paws, and if your pet licks these chemicals they could get some GI upset. Clean paws gently with warm water after coming inside from the snow to avoid this. Antifreeze tastes sweet to pets but is deadly, and should always be cleaned up immediately if spilled. If you suspect your pet has ingested antifreeze, call your veterinarian IMMEDIATELY. For more information on antifreeze see, http://www.criticalcarevets.com/antifreeze_20091124124940.pdf

Cats like to hide in warm places, including car engines. Be careful before starting your car, as cats can be injured by the fan belt or other parts of a moving engine. Knock on the hood or honk your horn before you start your car to flush the cat out of its hiding place.

During the cold winter months, many people use space heaters and wood-burning stoves to heat their homes. Do not allow unsupervised pets in areas with space heaters that could be knocked over by the animal. Placing "scat mats" on the floor may be helpful in keeping pets away from the stoves and heaters.

Electric blankets and heated water bottles are designed for human use only. Allowing your pet to lie on or near these items could cause burning, so beware and only use those items on yourself.

If possible, providing and indoor shelter for your pet during the worst weather is best. Also, you may be unable to leave your home for a few days because of the weather and therefore need to have things such as medication and food on hand. Remember that weather can change rapidly so it is best to be prepared BEFORE things get bad.

Sources:

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<http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=2+2098&aid=934>

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