

Hot Dog

With the soaring temperatures of this summer, it is vitally important we give extra thought to our dogs (or any of the animals entrusted to our care). We, as humans, have the benefit of sweat, which helps us cool down. Our beloved dogs do not have this benefit. When we sweat, we are cooled by evaporation and if a breeze hits us, it immediately cools our body. Our dogs benefit from a breeze but not quite the same way. The breeze will help dissipate the body heat so is helpful, but only mildly so, since they don't sweat.

When walking your dogs please be mindful of their feet. Asphalt and concrete can reach temperatures high enough to burn a dog's paws in as little as a minute! While concrete may be a little cooler than asphalt, it can still burn. Put the back of your hand (the back is more sensitive than your palm) on the surface and hold it there for 7 seconds. If it's too hot for you, it is too hot for your dog! Rather than walk on sidewalks, now is a great time to take advantage of shaded dirt trails in your area.

If you must walk around town, try to find shady streets, and make your dog walk on the grass. Bring an umbrella to help keep the sun off your dog's back while walking. Bring lots of cool water with you (use a thermos so it stays cool). You can use dog booties to help protect your dog's feet from hot asphalt if you can't carry them across a parking lot. Think of this while going to visits. If you can't carry your dog from the car to your visit location, put booties on them. Or find someone to go with you and drop your dog off in the grass with your helper while you park the car.

If you have a high energy dog and they must get that needed exercise every day, consider getting up early (very early) and exercise them before the sun comes up. Ground temperatures are generally cooler in the morning rather than the evening. Familiarize how to tell if your dog is getting too hot and what to do to cool them down.

Some signs to look for are:

- Excessively drooling
- Heavy panting and difficulty breathing
- The dog appears lethargic, drowsy, or uncoordinated or confused
- Vomiting
- May also seem stressed and unable to calm down, even when lying down
- Brick red gum color
- Fast pulse rate
- Collapse
- Refuses food

If your dog shows any of these signs, stop the exercise and get them into a cool shaded area immediately. Offer COOL water to drink but not ICE-COLD water. Ice cold water is too shocking to a hot body. You can wet their paws to help cool them down. Wipe their ears and belly with a damp towel (don't get water in the ears!). You can pour water over their head too, again NOT COLD water! Do NOT put wet towels over a dog to cool them down. This only traps heat in. You can have them lay on top of a cool wet towel though. If your dog has shown any signs of heat exhaustion as mentioned above, please get them to a vet as soon as possible.

Cooling jackets and do they work? No. In excessive heat, or while exercising, or in humid conditions I have found through experience that cooling jackets do not cool your dog off. If they are too wet, the water doesn't evaporate enough and holds heat in. If only a little wet, they do cool a tiny bit, but you are constantly adding water and they just end up holding heat in. It's better to save the water for your dog to drink or to soak their paws and head. Best to just follow good practices when temperatures are too hot for your dog. Avoid going outside when the temperatures are too hot for your dog to handle. Learn how to exercise your dog in the house. Tricks and other games are fun ways to give your dog physical and mental exercise in the home and do not need a lot of space!

Should you shave your dog to help them stay cool? There is conflicting information in this area. Many vets say shave but just as many say do not shave. But I believe that shaving a dog's coat down very short can expose them to sun burn. I feel a dog's coat can help protect them. A very long and thick coat can be thinned and trimmed down a bit to help with cooling. If you have a long thick coated dog, it is probably best you keep them out of the heat. Also be mindful of your thin coated dogs such as greyhounds or dalmatians so they don't get sunburned.

A word on ice. Many like to give their dogs ice to chew in the hot summer. Be careful with ice! A dog can crack or break a tooth when chewing on ice. Cool water is best.

By Chaplain Jill Marie Chambers