Heatstroke (Hyperthermia)

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Heatstroke occurs when normal body mechanisms cannot keep the body's temperature in a safe range. Animals do not have efficient cooling systems (like humans who sweat) and get overheated easily. A dog with moderate heatstroke (body temperature from 104º to 106ºF) can recover within an hour if given prompt first aid and veterinary care (normal body temperature is 100-102.5°F). Severe heatstroke (body temperature over 106ºF) can be deadly and immediate veterinary assistance is needed.

Signs

A dog suffering from heatstroke will display several signs:

- Rapid panting
- Bright red tongue
- Red or pale gums
- Thick, sticky saliva
- Depression
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Vomiting - sometimes with blood
- Diarrhea
- Shock
- Coma

What you should do

Remove the dog from the hot area immediately. Prior to taking him to your veterinarian, lower his temperature by wetting him thoroughly with cool water (for very small dogs, use lukewarm water), then increase air movement around him with a fan. **CAUTION:** Using very cold water can actually be counterproductive. Cooling too quickly and especially allowing his body temperature to become too low can cause other life-threatening medical conditions. The rectal temperature should be checked every 5 minutes. Once the body temperature is 103ºF, the cooling measures should be stopped and the dog should be dried thoroughly and covered so he does not continue to lose heat. Even if the dog appears to be recovering, take him to your veterinarian as soon as possible. He should still be examined since he may be dehydrated or have other complications.

Allow free access to water or a children's rehydrating solution if the dog can drink on his own. Do not try to force-feed cold water; the dog may inhale it or choke.

What your veterinarian will do

Your veterinarian will lower your dog's body temperature to a safe range (if you have not already) and continually monitor his temperature. Your dog will be given fluids, and possibly oxygen. He will be monitored for shock, respiratory distress, kidney failure, heart abnormalities, and other complications, and treated accordingly. Blood samples may be taken before and during the treatment. The clotting time of the blood will be monitored, since clotting problems are a common complication.

Aftercare

Dogs with moderate heatstroke often recover without complicating health problems. Severe heatstroke can cause organ damage that might need ongoing care such as a special diet prescribed by your veterinarian. Dogs who suffer from heatstroke once increase their risk for getting it again and steps must be taken to prevent it on hot, humid days.

Prevention

Any pet that cannot cool himself off is at risk for heatstroke. Following these guidelines can help prevent serious problems.

- Keep pets with predisposing conditions like heart disease, obesity, older age, or breathing problems cool and in the shade. Even normal activity for these pets can be harmful.
- Provide access to water at all times.
- Do not leave your pet in a hot parked car even if you're in the shade or will only be gone a short time. The temperature inside a parked car can quickly reach up to140 degrees.
- Make sure outside dogs have access to shade.
- On a hot day, restrict exercise and don't take your dog jogging with you. Too much exercise when the weather is very hot can be dangerous.
- Do not muzzle your dog.
- Avoid places like the beach and especially concrete or asphalt areas where heat is reflected and there is no access to shade.
- Wetting down your dog with cool water or allowing him to swim can help maintain a normal body temperature.
- Move your dog to a cool area of the house. Air conditioning is one of the best ways to keep a dog cool, but is not always dependable. To provide a cooler environment, freeze water in soda bottles, or place ice and a small amount of water in several resealable food storage bags, then wrap them in a towel or tube sock. Place them on the floor for the

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

dog to lay on.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*