

Hypothermia in Dogs

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Hypothermia is a condition in which the body temperature becomes too low for normal functioning. It is more common in animals who are short-haired, small, wet, or have no shelter during periods of cold temperatures.

What are the symptoms?

Animals with hypothermia often have violent shivering, slow and shallow respiration, and a slower heart rate. Their gums may appear pale or blue. If they are not warmed, they will become listless and eventually will be unresponsive and may die.

What are the risks?

If the body temperature becomes too low, dogs and cats will not be able to return their body to normal temperature without treatment. Injuries to tissues because of a decrease in the flow of oxygenated blood can occur. The extent of the injuries varies with the body temperature and duration of hypothermia. Hypothermia can be fatal.

What is the treatment?

Hypothermic animals should be warmed **slowly**. There are several ways to do this.

- The animal can be placed in a warm room and wrapped in warm blankets (run dry blankets or towels through the clothes dryer for a few minutes to warm them).
- Bottles filled with warm water can be wrapped in a towel and placed next to the animal (plastic soda bottles work well) in the armpit and groin areas where there is less hair. Do **NOT** place hot water bottles directly in contact with the animal's body since burns could occur even if the bottles do not seem that hot to you.
- Hair dryers can be helpful, especially if the animal is wet as well as hypothermic. Be careful to use the low setting; animals have been severely burned through the improper use of hair dryers.
- Warm water baths can be used for animals mildly hypothermic who will not have to be transported - taking a wet animal back out into the cold to go to the veterinarian will only make matters worse.

As they recover and move about, young animals, especially, may benefit from some honey or sugar dissolved in water (2 tablespoons to a cup of warm water).

While warming the animal, contact your veterinarian who can assess what other treatments may be necessary. Animals who are severely hypothermic may need additional care including intravenous fluids, oxygen, or warm fluids administered into the stomach, colon, or abdominal cavity as a way to warm the body core.

Animals may experience pain as the tissues warm, and bite at the painful areas. Use care, since animals in pain may inadvertently bite people as well.