Taking simple precautions during the dog days of summer can be the difference between keeping your pet healthy and losing him. Although it seems like common sense, having a fur coat prevents your dog from sweating like you do to cool down, so leaving him in high temperatures for extended periods of time can cause serious damage or, worse yet, be fatal.

**Never leave your pet in the car unattended**

You might just be doing a quick errand, but your pet can become overheated in mere minutes. On an 85-degree day, the inside temperature of a car can reach 102 within 10 minutes and can raise as much as 40 degrees in an hour. Even leaving the car windows cracked won’t help much, so if you need to run errands, it’s best to leave your pets at home.

**Learn to recognize heat stroke.**

If your pet is outside on hot, sunny days without shade, shelter or cool water, the likelihood he will experience heat stroke is extremely high. Learn to recognize the signs of this potentially fatal condition and how to stop it before it’s too late.

The first sign of heat stroke is heavier-than-normal panting and unusual agitation or distress. Your pet’s panting will become excessive and be accompanied by difficulty breathing and increased drooling. Eventually, your pet’s eyes will look glassy and gums will darken. His body temperature could rise high enough to cause brain damage and induce seizures, coma and ultimately death.

Take action as soon as possible to stop the progression of heat stroke. Cool your pet down by covering him with wet towels or giving him a bath in cool water. Do not use ice water, but if your pet is alert, you can offer him ice cubes. Even if your pet’s symptoms aren’t severe, err on the side of caution by seeking veterinary attention immediately.

**Protect your pets from UV rays.**

Many dogs and cats love to sit in the sun, but just like humans, they are at risk for sunburn—especially those with light or white coats. Limit your pet’s sun exposure and use pet-friendly sunblock on exposed areas, such as the tips of ears, forehead and nose. Do not use human sunscreen on your pets, as they are highly toxic if ingested.

**Bring outdoor pets inside in high temps.**

Even if you make sure your pet has shade and water, this might not be enough to protect your pet in extreme temperatures. Sunlight can heat a water in a typical pet bowl to hot, undrinkable temperatures. Make sure that your pet has a cool place in the shade and remember to check the water bowl several times a day to make sure the water is cold. Periodically adding ice cubes to the water bowl will help increase your pet’s consumption.

Provided by the Ohio Veterinary Medical Association Public Education Committee. Learn more online at www.ohiovma.org.

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