

## HOT WEATHER SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Permission is granted to use the below but I am not a veterinarian and this is NOT intended as a substitute for veterinary care.

The following is by no means a definitive summary, but rather a quick check list of some safety protocol for those of you who may be experiencing the need for hot weather protocols. Your vets offices may be posting up protocol on their websites. And if there is any question whatsoever CALL YOUR VET. Dogs die regularly from poorly handled heat problems. Repeat, don't guess, CALL YOUR VET.

So a couple quick concepts. Your dog/horse/cat/gerbil/our thermostat is at the base of the head. So cooling the back of the head is a critical area.

Your five point cooling chart is: back of the head; underbelly; inside of the front legs, especially the armpit; inside of the hind legs, especially the groin -- and if more severe, spine, and rectum.

Dogs cool by evaporation where the venous return system runs close to the surface. The venous return system on a quadriped resembles an upside down u which I will designate with ^, but would be more rounded. The ^ goes across the chest or groin and down the inside of each leg. So it looks sorta like ^---^ . Sorry, the best I can do, someone help me out!

So spraying or wiping down the belly and inside of the legs is key.

1. Alcohol is your friend. Especially for those of you who have humidity added to the heat, add 1/4 cup isopropyl alcohol to a basin (large bowl) of cool, not cold water, and use a washcloth to wipe down those area. Dilute additionally if you need to use around the rectum.

In bad cases you can put alcohol right into the bath tub. Fill with lukewarm -- coolish water, but NOT cold.

2. Avoid extremes of temperature if you have to cool an overheated dog. These can cause shock and catapult a dog into crises. Use cool water, not cold. Tepid is good.

3. Soaking down a heavy coated dog can put them into heat crises. If that coat mats down --- especially in HUMID areas, you have just created a thick matted blanket trapping heat in. If you have to really soak a thick coated dog you MUST cold blow out that coat, until mostly dry. That's why I typically only do the undercarriage unless we're really in crises, in which case you need to be on the phone with your vet.

So just to think about -- if you're swimming a heavy coated dog, large or small -- you need to fluff that coat back out, otherwise you have defeated your purpose. If you don't

have a doggy forced air dryer, just put your hair dryer on cold, and blow out especially the area all along the spine and the back of the head. You want that spine to breathe....so to speak.

4. For those of you who aren't having to maintain pretty coat for showing -- you may want to think about clipping the belly down. I hate a clipped down look, and love my coated dogs BUT you can easily clip a strip underneath the armpits and down the middle of the belly that you won't even see from the side. Especially some of your bigger dogs who are going to have more challenges with heat dispersal, a belly clip is really useful.

Aging dogs can have more difficulty with heat dispersal. As my long haired shepherd aged, I would clip a belly strip across his whole belly almost out to the outer fringe. You couldn't even see it unless he flashed his belly!

Again, you are increasing evaporation. If you have to compete in heat, it makes it really easy to keep the dog clean and neat AND cool that belly.

5. If you have never used a pro groomer and had them really blow out all that dead undercoat on coated breeds (but really just about any breed) -- make a new best friend. Getting that undercoat out (some dogs professionally groomed for the first time can lose a whole garbage can of dead undercoat) again increases loft, circulation, and evaporation. Even if you don't need a pro groomer for most of the year --- trust me, it is worth every penny in the summer. The difference in my shepherd's ability to cool after a grooming and before was like night and day and that's with daily grooming.

6. Forced air blowers are your friend. This is what the pro groomers use.

So you could invest in your own forced air blower and learn how to use it.....but it can take a couple hours of back brushing and blowing the first time to really work that coat out. Set up outside unless you want a hair storm in your house....or again, find a new best friend your local pro groomer.

7. Grooming. You may have to way step up basic grooming, and daily checks in the heat. Hot spots can occur in less than 12 hours if hair matts down and traps heat close to the skin. Key areas of potential hot spots are the neck under collars, butt/rump area, below the rectum in the thick feathers of coated dogs, and between the toes. Hot spots can happen underneath a too tight collar strap. Loosen collars in summertime to make sure there is air flow underneath. You can always tighten a collar temporarily during a walk.

For those of you using ecollars -- 2 hours max, and get it off and let the hair fluff up and cool. If you've used it while the dog was in water, really brush that ruff up with a brush and/or blow dry. Check underneath to make sure there are no pink areas underneath the strap or prongs. (I have had more hot spot issues from the strap than the prongs.) During daily grooming make sure you are really getting hair loosened down to the skin, and separate hair in deep areas to check skin. Pink spots are not good.

Contact your vet for hot spot protocol, but air is your friend. Clipping, cleaning, and antibiotics may be necessary and are the standard protocol.

8. Thermometer. Buy one. Learn how to use it. It's not that hard. Know what your dog's normal temp is, and what safety and danger zones are. Talk to your vet about their opinion about temperature ranges. Pups will have higher temps than adult dogs and heat up faster. Seniors again, may have increased problems with heat dispersal for a variety of aging reasons.

Absent that, learn what your dog feels like. You can feel temperature changes with your hands. My temperature spots are: inside of the ear, inside of the armpit, and inside of the groin. Put your thumb down in the middle crease of the dogs ear. That gives you a pretty good idea of how hot the dog is. If it feels hot, your dog is hot --- stop, get in the shade, and the cool. I also like to check with the palm of my hand in the armpit or the groin. Again, as you are learning, check these areas a few times of day so you begin to learn what normal is for your dog, so you'll know when the body feels hot.

Heat is just another piece of nature. But we can work in harmony with it, be proactive with correct cooling, and keep our dogs and ourselves safe and well. When in doubt, CALL YOUR VET. Have a safe summer everyone.

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