



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

VETERINARY MEDICAL CENTER

Pet Tips for Spring & Summer

With warmer weather, you and your pet may be spending more time outside and around the water. Here are a few tips to remember.

ID Your Pets

Increased outdoor activity, coupled with open doors and windows, can give your pet more opportunities to 'escape' outside. It's important to ID your pets. Even if your pet is microchipped, a visible ID can help them be returned to you more quickly. There are many types of collars available that are comfortable for your pet to wear. Many can also be personalized with your name and phone number embroidered directly on the collar. Make sure that the fit of the collar is appropriate and that the leash is sufficiently strong for your size pet.

Microchips are often called "the ID that cannot be lost". It is a small computer chip the size of a grain of rice that is commonly implanted in the pet near the shoulder blades. It is implanted with a special syringe and the procedure only takes a few moments. It may sting the pet momentarily, but this goes away quickly, and the benefits of having your pet micro-chipped far outweigh the few seconds of discomfort (the procedure is much like giving vaccinations to the animal). The chip is designed to attach itself inside the skin and it can be left in place for the rest of the animal's life without harm. If lost, your pet can be scanned and their unique number will come up. The microchip company can be contacted for your information so you and your pet can be reunited.

Traveling

Dogs might love the wind blowing in their face as you zoom down the highway, but allowing any pet to ride with its head out the window or worse, in the back of a pickup is extremely dangerous. Flying debris and insects can cause eye and inner ear injuries as well as lung infections. A loose pet in a vehicle becomes a flying projectile in the event of sudden turns, stops or accidents. Always secure pets in a comfortable harness or crate when traveling.

Never leave a pet in a hot car if traveling. Pets are just as susceptible to heat stroke as humans, and cars can become hot in just a few minutes. Leaving a car parked in the shade with a cracked window is no guarantee that pets will be safe.

Tick Prevention

Pets at risk for ticks should be treated with a monthly topical preventative medication. If you take your pet to tick-prone areas during camping, sporting or hiking trips, you should examine your pet for ticks immediately upon returning home and remove them. Prompt removal of ticks is very important because it lessens the chance of disease transmission from the tick to your pet. If your pet picks up ticks in your backyard, trimming bushes and removing brush may reduce your pet's exposure and risk of infection. And, if you find ticks on your pet, don't forget to check yourself for ticks also! The VMC's General Practice Service recommends the use of year-round heartworm, intestinal parasite, and flea/tick preventatives. These recommendations are also consistent with the National Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) guidelines.

Sunburn & Skin Cancer

Animals that have light-colored noses and skin and thin or very short hair are most in need of protection from the sun. The groin, inside legs, and belly also need sunscreen because hair is very thin and UV light can reflect off of concrete surfaces to affect the skin. Dogs who like to expose their belly to the sun and cats that like to spend time “sunbathing” at windows may need sunscreen. Keeping your pet in the shade can also help minimize the effects of sun on their skin. In pets, sunburn can appear as red skin or hair loss. Sunburn can irritate or exacerbate existing conditions. Skin cancer in dogs and cats can present in many different ways and may not be obvious to owners.

Sunscreen can be applied to the bridge of the nose, ear tips, skin surrounding the lips, and any area where pigmentation or skin color is low. It is important to remember that you need to use plenty of sunscreen, and you should reapply regularly during sun exposure. It is recommended to use about 1 tablespoon of lotion or cream for each body area treated. Sunscreen should be reapplied every 4-6 hours during the brightest time of the day from 10 am – 3 pm and every 2 hours if the animal is swimming.

There are a few sunscreens available specifically for pets. These include brands such as VetOne UVet Sunscreen Lotion or Spray SPF40 (for dogs, cats and horses) and Epi-Pet Sun Protector (not for use on cats). Consult your veterinarian for specific sunscreen recommendations for your pet.

Walking Your Dog

Exercise is important for your pet. The more active your dog is, the more water he will need. Make sure he has plenty of fresh water before and after your walk. If you're going for a long walk, take some water along for him. Remember that concrete and asphalt are tough on paws, especially on hot days. Try walking on dirt paths or grass as much as possible.

Dog Parks

Dog parks are sites of frequent injuries. While dogs love to play with other pets, the inevitable bite/scratch does occur. Be aware at all times of your pet's temperament and those of the pets around them. If two dogs do get in a fight, never attempt to separate them by getting between them. Even the most docile pet will bite its owner in those circumstances. Don't bring your dog to a dog park if he has ever shown aggression towards strangers, dog or human.

Swimming

Not all dogs enjoy swimming or can swim well.

- If your dog doesn't want to swim, don't force him. If your dog wants to swim and you are concerned, there are safety vests designed to keep your pet afloat in the water.
- Excessive ingestion of chlorinated pool water or lake water can result in vomiting and diarrhea. Watch for water related problems such as ear infections, a dull dry coat and signs of dehydration, which can occur quickly. (Check for dehydration by lifting your pet's lips and look for bright pink and moist gums.)
- Be sure to have plenty of fresh water available and provide plenty of shade and a cool dry shelter for your pet to rest.

Toxins

Everything from insects, spiders, toads, blue-green algae, compost, fertilizers, certain mulches, and many types of plants can be dangerous or toxic to your pet. Be sure to check to see if things are safe before putting them in your pet's environment.

Blue-green algae can pose harmful health risks to your pet including death.

Symptoms:

- Lethargy/disorientation
- Seizures
- Skin irritation
- Jaundice
- Difficulty breathing, death
- Vomiting/diarrhea
- Excess salivation
- Pale gums
- Neurological signs

Treatment:

- There is no antidote for the toxins produced by blue-green algae.
- **Immediate veterinary care is crucial.**

Heatstroke

Heat stroke is a condition in which the body heat raises to levels that cause illness and even death. Heat stroke is more likely to occur when the dog is not acclimated to the hot weather. Also, remember that the interior of cars heat rapidly. The temperature inside your car can rise almost 30 degrees F within 20 minutes. The longer you wait, the higher it goes...and the more dangerous it becomes. Every year, countless dogs die after being locked in cars while their owners work, visit, shop, or run other errands. These tragic deaths are entirely preventable.

Symptoms:

- Severe panting and weakness
- Reddened gums, vomiting, diarrhea
- Stumbling; reluctant to get up and walk
- Rise in their body temperature which can lead to confusion, seizures and coma

Left untreated, this excess temperature will cause cardiovascular shock, kidney failure, bleeding disorders and eventually death. When first suspected, the best thing to do is to stop any exercise and move to a cool environment. The most efficient way to bring the temperature down is to completely wet the dog with cool water. After wetting, take them to the nearest veterinary facility immediately. **Prompt medical attention provides the best chance of survival.** Even after the temperature returns to normal, the body's response to the heat injury can lead to severe complications that will need to be addressed.

Summer Holiday Tips

1. Grilling

Keep your pet away from matches, citronella candles, and lighter fluid, which can irritate the stomach, lungs, and central nervous system.

2. Food

Don't let people feed your pet. It's important to keep your pet on their regular diet. New foods can upset their digestive systems, and common foods such as onions, grapes, raisins, and avocado can make dogs sick.

3. Alcoholic Beverages

Alcohol is potentially poisonous to pets, so make sure your pet does not accidentally consume any wine, beer, or spirits.

4. Hydration

No matter where you are celebrating, make sure your pet has plenty of fresh, clean water available.

5. Rain or Shine

Make sure your pet has a comfortable place to get out of the sun, rain, and other types of weather.

6. Sunscreen/Insect Repellent

(See Sunburn and Skin Cancer on page two)

7. Glow Jewelry

While the luminescent substance contained in these products is not highly toxic, excessive drooling and gastrointestinal irritation could still result from ingestions, and intestinal blockage could occur from swallowing large pieces of the plastic containers.

8. Fireworks

Crowded fireworks displays are no fun for pets, so please resist the urge to take them to the festivities. Instead, keep your little guys safe from the noise in a quiet, sheltered and escape-proof area at home. If your dog is really stressed by fireworks, storms or other noises, behavior modification as well as medications to reduce anxiety can be really helpful. Today's medications are much better at reducing anxiety without sedation. In fact, sedated dogs are not necessarily less anxious, so tranquilizers and sedatives may not be even helpful! If you need help managing your dog's storm or fireworks anxiety, discuss your concerns with your veterinarian.