

Brrr...It's Cold!

Keeping Pets Safe in Cold Temperatures

Extremely cold temperatures can cause serious problems for animals who are outside for even short periods of time. Most pets are not bred to withstand temperatures below freezing (32°F).



Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when an animal's internal temperature becomes too low for the body to function normally. It can affect all animals but those who are wet, small, elderly, young, or outside with no shelter are most affected. Hypothermia is a medical emergency and you should contact your veterinarian or a 24-hour veterinary emergency hospital immediately if you find an animal with these symptoms.

Symptoms of hypothermia:

- Severe lethargy
- Decreased appetite
- Decreased responsiveness
- Low body temperature (on average below 98°F)
- Discoloration of skin – especially red or blackened extremities

Injuries

Keep in mind that injuries can also occur when indoor pets go outside to play or use the bathroom. Injuries that can occur are:

- Orthopedic injuries from slipping on icy surfaces
- Falling through thin ice into freezing water
- Injuries to pads and paws from sharp ice fragments
- Irritation in between toes from snow/ice balls forming in fur around toes
 - Check for snow or ice accumulation especially between the toes. Slowly and gently apply warm water to release the snow balls from the fur.
 - Consider purchasing booties for your dog to protect paws during a wintertime walk.

Antifreeze

Antifreeze is an extremely dangerous winter toxin. Pets are attracted to the odor and taste of it. Ingestion of antifreeze can cause acute, fatal kidney failure. Be sure to clean up any antifreeze spills that may result when adding or changing the antifreeze in your car and make sure antifreeze is in sealed containers that are out of reach of children and pets. If your pet does ingest antifreeze, seek immediate veterinary attention.

Ice Melt

While ice melt is not toxic, these salt-based products can cause irritation to your pet's mouth and skin. They can also cause GI signs if large volumes are ingested. If possible, purchase pet-friendly ice melt to use at home. If your pet is exposed to ice melt during walks on streets and sidewalks, wipe off your pet's paws to prevent licking and ingestion.

