

Ask the Vet



Michael Andress, DVM

Dr. Andress is the co-owner of Gate City Animal Hospital in Greensboro, which was established in 1997. He received his B.S. in Microbiology from Clemson University, then went on to obtain his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Georgia. His work has been published in several veterinary medicine journals and he has spoken at local and national veterinary conferences. His special interests are in surgery and internal medicine.

Heat Stroke in Dogs

Summertime is almost here. Soon it will be time to head to the pool, wear flip flops, and try to keep our kids entertained during their summer break. But as the temperature rises, don't forget that our canine companions are susceptible to heat stroke. Heat stroke is a life threatening process in which the body is no longer able to control an elevated body temperature, potentially leading to severe organ damage.

Dogs only sweat through their paw pads, which of course is not very effective. Their major mechanism for heat dissipation is through panting. Dogs with heavy hair coats, overweight dogs and short nosed dogs such as Pugs and Bulldogs have more trouble with heat stroke. But given the right conditions any dog can be affected. Environmental factors that contribute to heat stroke development are high heat and humidity, low ventilation and water deprivation. When the outside temperature is just 80 degrees, a closed car will reach 109 degrees in 20 minutes. Cracking a window does very little to help.

Q What are common signs of heat stroke?

A Once dogs become overheated, the common signs of heat stroke are panting, increased heart rate, excessive salivation, weakness, vomiting and diarrhea. As the disease progresses shock, seizures and organ failure may develop. Immediate veterinary attention is needed as this condition can be fatal.

Q What is the treatment for heat stroke?

A The first part of treatment is to get the patient out of the hot environment and quickly, but correctly, cool the body down. Using ice or even cold water can actually worsen the situation by causing blood vessels to constrict and prevent core cooling. The proper way to lower the body temperature is using fans and water soaked towels under the arm pits and groin areas. Depending on the severity of the case, the patient is given intravenous fluids, antibiotics, stomach protectants and oxygen among other treatments. Some require several days of hospitalization. Even with aggressive care, some dogs cannot overcome the heat damage and die from organ failure.

Q What can be done to prevent heat stroke?

A Prevention is the most important act that a pet owner can do. If your dog is outside, make sure that he is acclimated to higher temperatures. Have adequate shade protection for outside dogs. Always provide plenty of water. Avoid exercising your dog during the hottest part of the day. Take extra precautions with dogs that have heat stroke risk factors such as sicknesses, short noses, thick hair coats and being overweight. Never force water into your dog's mouth. Do not confine your dog to small enclosed areas with poor ventilation. Unfortunately, too many dogs develop heat stroke when kept in cars even for a short period of time.

Let's all have a great summer and remember to keep our dogs safe and cool.

Gate City Animal Hospital



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