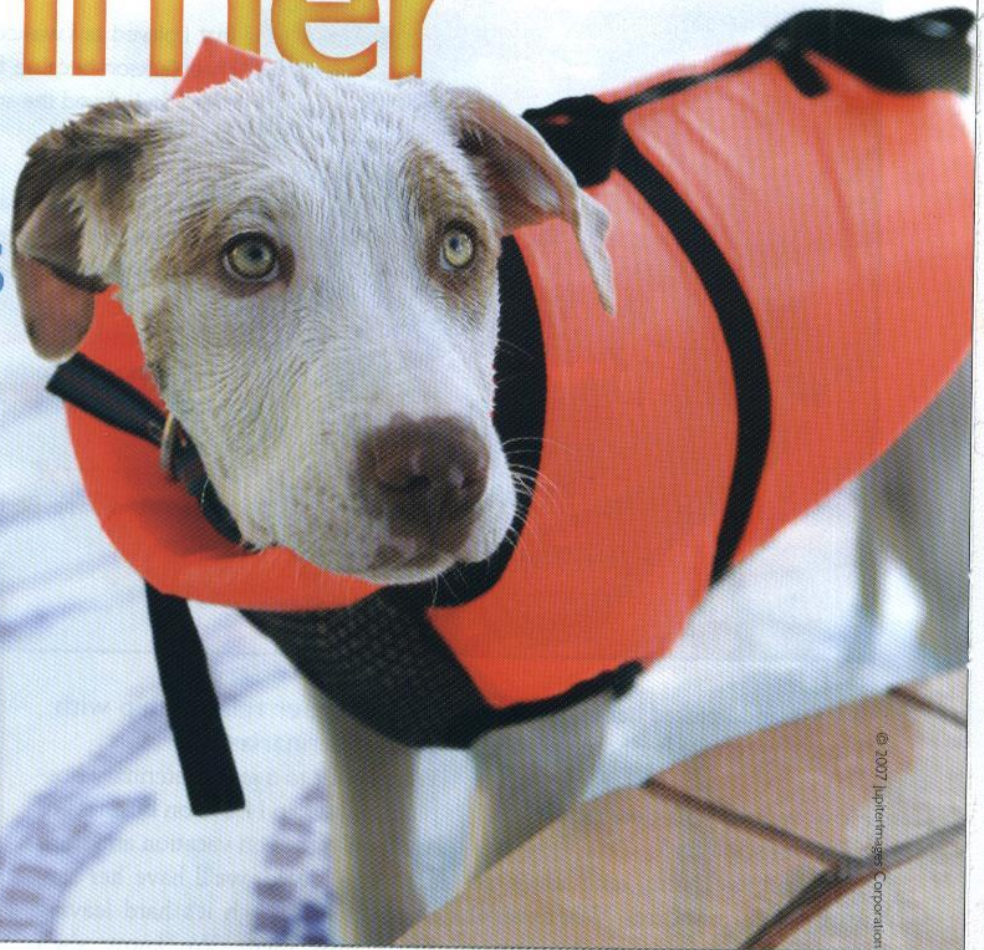


Summer health hazards

Summer Health Hazards



By Andrea Vardaro Tucker

Protecting your pet against hot-weather dangers

Summer offers countless opportunities for fun in the sun with your pet. But before you plan your vacation, hold a summer-kick-off picnic, or go for that first swim of the season, read ahead for helpful tips for avoiding summertime challenges to your pet's well-being.

KEYS TO KEEPING COOL

"Heatstroke remains the most easily prevented, yet most common, summer-related danger for dogs," says Dr. Mindy A. Cohan, a veterinarian at Spring House Animal Hospital in Lower Gwynedd, Pennsylvania, and Fort Washington Veterinary Hospital

in Pennsylvania. "There never seems to be enough media attention on the serious nature of heatstroke and the means by which it can be avoided."

To prevent your pet from overheating, it is best to keep him inside, preferably in air-conditioning, especially during the hottest part of the day. Exercise your pet in the morning or evening when the weather is cooler, and offer him plenty of fresh water and frequent breaks in shady, well-ventilated areas. Be especially wary of the threat of heat to very young, senior, or overweight pets and brachycephalic breeds (those with short, wide heads) such as pugs,

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Pekingese dogs, and Persian cats, as well as those with particularly heavy coats. You could also consider swimming with your pet as an alternative to walking during the summer.

Before you take your pet to the ocean or any other body of water, make sure animals are permitted. Consult the lifeguard on duty for the day's water conditions, including the



Never leave your pet in a parked car. In warm weather, the temperature inside can rise dramatically in minutes.

It may surprise you to learn that people aren't the only creatures who can burn if they spend too much time in the sun. Pets, especially those with light-colored noses or coats and those that have been recently groomed, can also become sunburned and, therefore, are at risk for skin cancer. Protect your pet's sensitive nose, ear tips, and other exposed areas with sunscreen that has an SPF of at least 30, according to Dr. Heather Hoch, resident of Small Animal Internal Medicine at Louisiana State University. However, you should avoid sunscreens with zinc, which can be dangerous if a pet ingests them.

WATER WOES

Never leave your pet unattended near a pool. "Near-drowning occurs with relative frequency but is not limited to oceans," says Dr. Karl E. Jandrey, a lecturer in small animal emergency and intensive care services at the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital of the University of California, Davis. "It is more common for dogs to fall into backyard pools."

If a pet has a near-drowning experience and is conscious, wrap him with a towel or blanket and seek immediate veterinary attention. You'll want to be able to react quickly in case of an emergency, so ask your veterinarian ahead of time for advice on what you should do if the pet is unconscious.

presence of jellyfish, for which pets are easy targets. Pets should never consume salt water (it will make them sick), so bring along a good supply of cool drinking water. After your pet swims, rinse off his coat. Keep him out of cold, fast-flowing, or turbulent water. If boating, your pet should wear a lifejacket. Also, Dr. Hoch advises pet owners to be aware of hazards lurking under the water, such as glass or nails, and to dry their pet's ears frequently because wet ears are prone to yeast infections.

PESKY PESTS

Both external and internal parasite infections increase in the warm weather because the parasites' eggs mature faster, explains Dr. Hoch. Before summer begins, talk with your veterinarian to devise an effective defense strategy against these parasites. In addition, you can discuss whether your pet should be tested for heartworms and intestinal parasites, such as roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, and tapeworms.

To decrease your pet's odds of contracting any diseases carried by mosquitoes, such as heartworm disease or West Nile virus:

- Keep your pet indoors at dusk and dawn.
- Keep your doors and windows screened.
- Eliminate standing water, where mosquitoes breed.

The good news is that products that protect your pet against heartworms can help prevent intestinal parasites as well. In fact, it is easier than ever to protect your pet against fleas, ticks, heartworms, and intestinal parasites. Many of the products on the market offer protection against multiple types of parasites.

TERRIBLE TOXINS

During the summer, pets will likely encounter plants, chemicals, and various other substances that can be toxic to them, including antifreeze, chlorine, garbage, fertilizers, "non-toxic" lawn chemicals, pesticides,

Recognizing Warning Signs and Treating Heatstroke

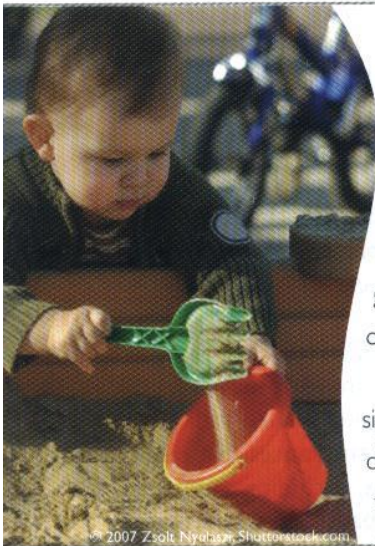


"Pets with suspected heatstroke should be cooled with water immediately and rushed to a veterinarian," Dr. Cohan says. Keep an eye out for these symptoms of heatstroke in your cat or dog:

- Brick-red gums
- Drooling or frothing at the mouth
- Exaggerated panting
- Glazed expression, staring, or glassy eyes
- Rapid pulse
- Temperature higher than 104°F
- Unsteadiness or incoordination
- Weakness

More severe symptoms include diarrhea, vomiting, and seizures.

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Summer Brings More Than Just Hot Weather

Intestinal parasites can be zoonotic, meaning they can spread from your pets to you, so never touch droppings, soil, or fur that you think may be contaminated. Always keep sandboxes covered, use gloves while gardening, wash your hands after being outside, and do not allow your pet to eat droppings.

Contact your veterinarian if you notice any of these signs of intestinal parasite infection: change in appetite, change in coat, coughing, diarrhea, weight loss, or licking the anal area or scooting.

and even some foods and beverages enjoyed at summer festivities.

Any change in your pet's behavior or physical or neurological signs such as convulsions, digestive problems, excess salivation, or difficulty breathing can spell trouble. Call your veterinarian immediately. You can also contact the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center at 888-426-4435. A consultation fee will apply.

HAVE PET, WILL TRAVEL?

Traveling with your pet requires some extra planning. Check in advance for any pet restrictions from your airline, hotel, or any other destinations or modes of transportation. Before you leave, take your pet for a veterinary check-up and obtain a health certificate and proof of vaccinations. Also, just to be safe, plan ahead by getting contact information for a veterinary facility in your vacation spot. As always, make sure your pet has proper, up-to-date identification. Dr. K. M. Peter, program director of the Veterinary Technology Program at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills, California, emphasizes, "A pet without a collar and name tag is just another stray!" Ask your veterinarian about micro-

chipping, a reliable way to prevent pets from becoming permanently lost.

If you are driving to your destination, do not allow your pet to stick his head out of the window or ride in the bed of a truck, and keep your pet secured in some type of carrier or harness in case of an accident or even a bump in the road. Allow your pet to become accustomed to the carrier you will use. In addition, you might want to take several short practice trips with him. If your pet is prone to motion sickness, ask your veterinarian how to make the trip go more smoothly.

"Do not force pets to travel if it is a problem for them," Dr. Jandrey warns. Finding a trusted family member or friend, using a pet sitter, or

boarding your pet may be better alternatives. If your pet is uncomfortable around other animals or needs individualized human contact, asking a trusted, responsible family member or friend to take care of your pet or hiring a pet sitter may be the best option. Check all potential pet sitters' references, conduct a personal interview, and have the sitter and your pet get to know each other during a shorter sitting session in advance of your vacation. Give your pet's caretaker phone numbers where you can be reached, your veterinarian's contact information, and a list of any special needs your pet may have.

Summertime can mean a lot of fun with your pet, but with its potential hazards, it also serves as a reminder that most dogs and cats should spend the majority of their time indoors to avoid injury and disease. During the summer months, the chance of a pet escaping the home escalates, especially as a fear response to thunder or fireworks, so make sure that windows and doors are kept tightly closed and that your dog or cat wears a collar with sturdy identification tags.

If you follow these words of wisdom, your summer is sure to go swimmingly! **HP**

Andrea Vardaro Tucker is a freelance writer and professional copyeditor who resides in Langhorne, Pennsylvania.

On Your Way to a Pet-Safe Vacation

Before taking your pet on vacation, don't forget to do your research. Dr. Peter recommends these resources for traveling with your pet:

- Helpful government site: www.aphis.usda.gov/ac/pettravel.html
- Helpful veterinary site: www.avma.org (search for "traveling")

