

Heat Stroke

Also known as Hyperthermia or Heat Exhaustion, Heat Stroke is an emergency that requires immediate medical attention and treatment. Dogs do not sweat, and thus they do not tolerate high environmental temperatures as well as humans do. Dogs depend on panting to exchange warm air for cool air. When air temperature is close to body temperature, cooling by panting is not an efficient process.

Common situations that can set the stage for heat stroke in dogs include:

- Being left in a car in hot weather.
- Exercising strenuously in hot, humid weather.
- Being a brachycephalic breed such as a Bulldog, Pug or Pekingese.
- Suffering from a heart or lung disease that interferes with efficient breathing.
- Being muzzled under a hair dryer or in hot weather
- Being confined to concrete or asphalt surfaces.
- Suffering from high fever or seizures.
- Being confined without shade in hot weather by not having a place to escape the heat.
- Having a history of heat stroke.

Heat stroke begins with heavy panting and difficulty breathing. The tongue and mucous membranes appear bright red. The saliva is thick and tenacious, and the dog often vomits. The rectal temperature rises from 104 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit. The dog becomes progressively unsteady and passes bloody diarrhea. With shock, the lips and mucous membranes turn gray. Collapse, seizures, coma and death ensue rapidly.

Treatment: Get your dog to your vet immediately. If not possible, emergency measures to cool the dog must begin at once. Move the dog out of the source of the heat, preferably into an air-conditioned building. Take the rectal temperature every 10 minutes. Mild cases respond by moving the dog into a cool environment. If the rectal temperature is above 104 degrees F, begin rapid cooling by spraying the dog with a garden hose or immersing it into a tub of cold water for up to two minutes. Place the wet dog in front of an electric fan. Monitor his rectal temperature and continue the cooling process until the rectal temperature falls below 103 degrees F. At this point stop the cooling process and dry the dog. Further cooling may produce hypothermia and shock. Get your dog to the veterinarian as soon as possible for further treatment.

Prevention:

- Dogs with airway disease and breathing problems should be kept indoors during periods of high heat and humidity.
- Never leave your dog in a car, even if in the shade and windows cracked.
- When traveling by car, crate the dog in a well-ventilated dog carrier or an open wire cage.
- Restrict exercise in hot weather.
- Always provide shade and plenty of cool water to dogs outdoors, particularly those kenneled on cement or asphalt surfaces.
- If kept outdoors, provide a good quality dog house or enclosed area to escape the sun. Make sure to keep this area out of direct sunlight.