

Points on Pets: Don't leave dogs in cars during hot season

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: Last summer we read about a sad situation involving a dog that was left in a car while the owner went into a convenience store to purchase a few things. The dog died because of heat stroke, even though it was only left in the car for a few minutes.

Please warn your readers about the dangers of leaving pets and children in cars during the hot summer months. Maybe a pet or child will be saved.

A: Leaving pets or children in closed or semi-closed automobiles is extremely dangerous during any time of the year, but particularly during the warm and hot months of the year. Unfortunately, many people do not realize that whenever the outside temperature is 85 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, the temperature within a closed car or truck can reach killing temperatures within 15 minutes after the air conditioner is turned off. Of course, lethal temperatures can be reached even faster in dark colored vehicles.

Common signs of heat stress in dogs include high rectal temperatures, rapid breathing, fast pulse rates, red gums, weakness, anxiousness, vomiting, collapse and death. It is not uncommon for the rectal temperatures in heat stressed dogs to reach 106 to 109 degrees Fahrenheit. Normal rectal temperatures in dogs rarely exceed 102.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Heat stress in dogs is truly an emergency and must be dealt with as soon as possible.

Dogs suffering due to heat stress can be immersed in cold water. If immersion is not possible, spraying the dog with cold water is usually helpful. Ice can be placed between the thighs and on the head to bring the dog's temperature down to normal. Obviously, dogs suffering due to heat stress should be moved into an air-conditioned room as quickly as possible. Small amounts of ice or cold water can be offered if the dog is conscious and able to eat and drink.

Any animal thought to be suffering because of heat stress should be taken to a veterinarian as soon as possible. Relapses commonly occur following periods of apparent recovery from heat stress.

Everything possible should be done to prevent heat stress in pets and children. Anyone seeing a pet or child alone in a parked car during the warm and hot times of the year should call the local police or emergency personnel as soon as possible. Suffering due to heat stress in parked cars is preventable.

Q: Is it possible for a dog to get sunburned? We have noticed that our little white dog's skin looks more red after she is out in the sun for several hours with us at the beach. Our dog's hair is very fine and fairly thin.

A: The redness that you are seeing after your dog has been in the sun is quite likely due to sunburn. Just as in humans, sunburns on dogs can lead to serious problems such as intense pain, skin peeling, sores that can become infected, and even skin cancer. In most dogs, unprotected areas such as the nose and lips are particularly vulnerable to sunburning.

You should take the same precautionary steps for preventing sunburning in your dog as you do for yourself. This, of course, includes limiting the amount of exposure to the sun and applying sunblock products to her exposed areas.

Your veterinarian can give you additional advice regarding sunburns. Overexposure to the sun is dangerous for both humans and pets.

Send e-mail to copleysd@copleynews.com or write to Pets, Copley News Service, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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