

PRESS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Kathy Finnie, Executive Director
Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
802-878-6888
Kathy@vtvets.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oh the Weather Outside is Frightful... For Pets, Too! Cold Weather Dangers for Pets

*by M. Kathleen Shaw, DVM
Vermont Veterinary Medical Association*

Temperatures are dropping, and with the colder weather, it's time to think about the dangers this presents for our pets, both indoors and outdoors only ones. By taking a few common sense precautions, you can help reduce the cold weather dangers to your pets.

Although some pets are conditioned to cold weather, veterinary experts agree that you should bring outdoor pets indoors if the temperature drops below 20 degrees Fahrenheit. Puppies, kittens, and short haired pets should not be left outside for extended periods anytime the temperature goes below 40 degrees. For pets with long hair, proper grooming is essential to help them maintain a layer of warming air within their coat. Pets who are heavily matted cannot keep themselves warm.

If your pet must stay outdoors, be sure to provide shelter for your pet: they can suffer from frostbite and hypothermia just like we do. A pet's outdoor house must have at least three enclosed sides, be elevated off the ground, and contain generous amounts of bedding such as straw or hay. In cold weather, bigger is not always better. A house just big enough for your pet will warm up faster and retain heat better than something that is too big. Your outdoor pet will need access to fresh water that isn't frozen. Use heated water bowls and replenish them frequently.

Cats love to warm up underneath car hoods. If cats have access to your car outdoors or in your garage, be sure to pound on the hood of the car prior to starting it. Many cats are killed or grievously injured by fan belts and moving engine parts. Another danger that cars present to pets in cold weather is antifreeze poisoning. If you suspect your pet has consumed any antifreeze at all, call your veterinarian immediately.

Consider keeping dogs on a leash when they go outside. Each winter we see cases of dogs that have gone off exploring "frozen" lakes or streams and fall through the ice into the frigid water.

Inside the house, monitor all pets around wood-burning stoves, fireplaces, and space heaters. These can cause severe burns. Younger pets romping through the house can knock objects into these heat sources and cause a fire, so make sure to "pet-proof" the areas around them. With the colder darker months, many people like to use candles in the home. Make sure to place them where pets (especially cats) do not have access. They can not only tip over the candle, they can set their fur on fire leading to serious burns.

Our pets can suffer from arthritis in cold weather, just like humans do and it is just as painful for them. If you are unsure if your pet has arthritis, want to know ways to keep your older pets comfortable during the cold weather, or if you have questions about cold weather issues with your pets, talk to your veterinarian.

###

The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 330 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.