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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Surviving Summer in a Fur Coat : Heat Dangers for our Pets

*By the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
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With temperatures on the rise, many people don't realize that our pets can have trouble with heat too. If you think it's hot outside, imagine wearing a fur coat in this heat! In addition, our pets have very limited ways of cooling themselves. Pets pant and that's about it.

It's the season of street fairs, festivals, and other community events for humans. While you are enjoying the attractions, in the crowded venue your dog is being jostled, stepped on, eating who knows what that's fallen on the ground, and often, overheating. Many events prohibit dogs for this reason and the fact that often people will leave dogs in the car to avoid the above dangers. This is even worse for them.

Sadly, every year veterinarians see cases where dogs die from heat stroke after being left in a parked car, often with the windows rolled down a couple of inches. A pet would last only for a short while in a parked car - this is true even with the windows rolled partially down: the inside temperature of a car can reach 120 to 160 degrees in just 30 minutes. If we have to sit in the car while a friend runs into a store, the first thing we do is turn on the air conditioning or roll the windows all the way down, or even keep the door to the car open. Now imagine how hard it is for your dog, who has a fur coat, cannot sweat, and is locked in the car with the temperatures rising and the windows just open an inch or two. If you leave your pet in your car on a hot day, you are risking their lives and potentially criminal charges. vPolice and animal control officers will not hesitate to break a car window to access a distressed dog locked in a hot car if you can't be located. And, once they find you, charges will likely be in order.

The solution? If you cannot bear to leave your dog at home before heading off to that fun summer event, check in advance to make sure dogs are allowed. Bring water for your pet to drink and also to wet him down. Keep dogs on a short lead and keep a close eye on them to avoid them eating people food that's been dropped. (That can cause serious stomach upset). If you are going to leave your dog at home, outside, it is extremely important to provide pets with a few basic survival items in this heat.

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If your dog is going to spend the day outside, remember to provide shade, keeping in mind that a shady area in the morning could be a sunny one in the afternoon. Leave a sprinkler on or hose down the dog two to three times a day. Provide a lot of drinking water, and put ice cubes in it to help it stay cold. Some owners run a fan on the porch for their pets, or bring them inside during the hottest hours of the day. Many dogs dig cooling holes this time of year: it is normal. Don't forget your outdoor cats. Leave a bowl of fresh water out for them at all times.

All veterinarians have seen and treated many cases of heat stress and heat stroke: many of them fatal. If your pet's temperature goes just a few degrees above normal, organ damage and potentially death can occur. Signs a pet may be in trouble from the heat include vigorous panting at rest, unwillingness to rise, frothing from the nose or mouth, or rigid muscles. If you find a pet in trouble, remove it from the hot environment: (shade, indoors). Wet the body with cool (not cold) water and wet the pads of the feet with rubbing alcohol. No ice or cold water should be applied. (This is because serious clotting disorders can be triggered by cooling the pet too fast.) Then call and transport your pet to your veterinarian as soon as possible.

We cannot prevent summer heat, but we can prevent most cases of heat stroke and stress in pets with common sense precautions. Don't leave your pet in the car, even for a few minutes, and if you leave them outside at home, follow the above preventative guidelines. They may save your pet's life.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is a professional organization of 350 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine. For more information, visit www.vtvets.org or call (802) 878-6888.