

Heatstroke in dogs: Clinical signs and prevention

If your dog is showing any signs of heatstroke it is vital that you bring them to the vet immediately.

Dogs are only able to sweat from their feet and around their nose, this means they don't deal with heat as well as humans do. Dogs are not as efficient in cooling themselves as we are. It is important that just because you can handle the heat, you understand that your dog might not be able to!

Panting is a very important tool which your dog uses to keep themselves cool.

Signs of heat stroke in dogs

- Faster, heavier panting and breathing
- Barking, whining or signs of discomfort
- Excessive thirst
- Excessive drooling
- Increased pulse and heartbeat
- Dark-coloured (red or purple) gums or tongue
- Glassy eyes
- Elevated body temperature = over 104°F
- Staggering, weakness or collapse
- Seizures
- Unconsciousness

What is heat stroke?

Heat stroke is a condition caused by the body overheating. It is usually caused by external factors and is not caused by fever. This is why it is referred to as nonpyrogenic hyperthermia.

What can cause heat stroke?

Any hot environment can cause heat stroke in dogs. Commonly, leaving a dog in a car or forgetting to provide water and shade when they are outdoors.

It most commonly occurs during the summer months, but in Cayman we are lucky enough to have hot weather all year round which means our dogs can get heatstroke anytime of the year.

Some dogs are more likely to get heat stroke than others. Dogs with thick fur, short noses, overweight or those suffering from medical conditions are predisposed to heatstroke. Even dogs who enjoy constant exercise and playtime should be closely monitored for symptoms of heat stroke, especially on hot and humid days.

Any dog can get heatstroke, even if you think your dog is "used to" the heat!

Until you can get to the veterinarian, be sure to:

- Remove the dog from the hot environment immediately.
- Do not give the dog aspirin or any other medication. This will cause further problems when trying to treat the dog.
- Let your dog drink as much cool water as they want without forcing them to drink.
- Cool your dog off with cold water by placing a soaked towel on their back.

Take your dog to the vet ASAP. Heatstroke is a life-threatening illness and needs to be treated as an emergency.

How will we treat your dog?

Treatment will include replacing your dog's fluid loss and mineral loss with intravenous fluid therapy.

We will also monitor your dog for secondary complications such as kidney failure, development of neurologic symptoms, abnormal clotting, changes in blood pressure and electrolyte abnormalities.

How to prevent heatstroke?

It is important to always be alert of the outside temperature and take appropriate measures to prevent heat stroke, especially during hot and humid conditions. The heat we experience every day in Cayman is enough to cause heatstroke in dogs. For this reason, it is important that you follow these rules to prevent heatstroke:

- Ensure your dog always has access to plenty of cool water both inside and outside
- Ensure your dog always has access to shade when outside.
- While in cars, make sure your dog is kept in an area with good ventilation and NEVER leave your dog in the car. Leaving the windows open or cracked is not a good enough to protect your dog.
- Restrict exercise on hot days.
- Walk your dog early in the morning or late in the evening to avoid the hottest part of the day.
- Never leave dogs in hot rooms or sun traps.
- Always take water on a walk with your dog.
- Spray your dog down with cool water.

Note: The advice provided in this post is intended for informational purposes and does not constitute medical advice regarding pets. Please make an appointment with the vet for an accurate diagnosis of your pet's condition.