

Winter Safety Tips for Dogs



Know your dog's limits!

Just like people, pets' cold tolerance can vary from pet to pet based on their coat, body fat stores, activity level, and health. Short-coated, thin, elderly, or very young dogs get cold more quickly – so adjust the amount of time they stay outside! If your dog enjoys being outdoors and you will be outside longer than a few minutes, consider outfitting them with a sweater or coat to keep it warm. Hypothermia and frostbite pose major risks to dogs in winter.

Keep them leashed!

More pets become lost in winter because snow and ice can hide recognizable scents that might normally help your pet find their way back home. Make sure your pet has a well-fitting collar with up-to-date identification and contact information. A microchip is a more permanent means of identification, but it's critical that you keep the registration up to date.

Wipe their paws!

During winter walks, your dog's paws can pick up all kinds of toxic chemicals – salt, antifreeze, or deicers. Be sure to wipe off your dog's paws when you return from walks to prevent him from licking it off and becoming sick. When wiping off your dog's paws, remember to check for signs of injury, such as cracked or bleeding paws.



Remember, if it's too cold for you, it's probably too cold for your pet.

Leave them home!

Hot cars are a known threat to pets, but cold cars also pose significant risk to your pet's health. You're already familiar with how a car can rapidly cool down in cold weather; it becomes like a refrigerator, and can rapidly chill your pet. Pets that are young, old, ill, or thin are particularly susceptible to cold environments and should never be left in cold cars. Limit car travel to only that which is necessary, and don't leave your pet unattended in the vehicle.

Avoid ice:

When walking your dog, stay away from frozen ponds, lakes, and other water. You don't know if the ice will support your dog's weight, and if your dog breaks through the ice it could be deadly. And if this happens and you instinctively try to save your dog, both of your lives could be in jeopardy.

Check the hood!

A warm vehicle engine can be an appealing heat source for outdoor and feral cats, but it's deadly. Prevent injuries by banging loudly on your hood or honking the horn before starting your car. This will wake up the cat and give it a chance to escape before starting the car.

Avoid spills!

Antifreeze attracts cats and dogs because it is very sweet to taste, but it is extremely poisonous and can cause serious illness or death when ingested. Be sure to clean up any antifreeze that spills in your garage, and keep the bottle somewhere your pets cannot access.

Give them shelter!

Ideally, all pets should be kept inside during extreme weather. If your pet lives outdoors primarily, bring them indoors during sub-zero temperatures. For the rest of the winter, provide them with a dry, draft-free shelter that is large enough to allow them to sit and lay down comfortably, but small enough to conserve body heat. The floor should be raised a few inches off the ground and covered with cedar shavings or straw. Turn the shelter so it faces away from the wind and cover the doorway with waterproof burlap or heavy plastic. Also, pets who spend a lot of time outside need more food to replace energy lost from trying to stay warm. Use plastic food and water dishes instead of metal – when the temperature is low enough, your pets' tongue can become stuck to metal.

Be prepared!

Winter brings extreme weather that can cause power outages. Have an emergency plan and make sure they include your pets! Have an emergency kit with enough food, water, and medication to last your pets at least five days. Most likely you will never need it, but if you do, you will be thankful you planned ahead!