



Heat stroke Prevention

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Recognition of the signs of heat exhaustion/stroke:

You should become concerned when:

1. A normally active dog flops down on trail or refuses to get up during a change in activity.
2. Excessive panting with what I call "bologna tongue"--the tongue comes so far out of the mouth that it flattens and widens and curls up at the end.
3. Intense "brick" red color to insides of ears and mouth (lavender to blue is a very bad sign).
4. Weakness in the legs (hence the "flopping" down), a staggering or drunk-like gait.
5. "Glassy" eyes--a sense that mental function is fading in and out .
6. Collapse followed by runny diarrhea (shock imminent)

The only accurate way to measure a dog's temperature is with a rectal thermometer!

Temps of 103.5 with a dog showing signs of exhaustion is grounds for rethinking further activity and taking steps towards cooling down the dog.

Some tips on cooling down a hot dog:

1. Cold water (not ice) concentrating on the back of the head (where the brain stem is), on the jugular veins in the neck and between the hind legs--these areas have large superficial veins that will continue to pump hot blood past your cooling water and return cooler blood to the main part of the body.
2. Alcohol (rubbing) repeatedly applied to the foot pads will quickly evaporate for a cooling action.
3. Immerse the entire dog in a cold (not freezing) bath. Avoid leaving in too long--it is possible to drive the temp down too low and send your dog spiraling in the other direction--I usually continue cooling down until the body temp is less than 104 but not below 103. If you are out hiking, and you have access to water, then stand the dog in a running stream (submerge up to chest level if deep enough). Cold wet towels laid across the dog can also help if there is not enough water available to thoroughly wet the dog, or if you have wet it but now are looking to transport it for further treatment.

4. Some people shave the bellies of working dogs with long coats much like a "trace" clip on a horse in winter. The removal of belly hair allows for a greater degree of cooling but the bulk of the coat is still present (which is a natural insulator against both heat and cold). This is best done preventatively, of course.

5. Check back issues of Whole Dog Journal--they ran an article on cooling mats and icy bandanas for your dog a few years back. These products are best used to help cool down between activities rather than to treat a dog once over-heated.

REMEMBER!: your dog can continue to increase in internal body temperature long after the activity has ceased and you are now back in a cooler environment, so if he is not responding to a cooler environment, recheck that temperature.

Temperatures near/greater than 106 are a **true emergency** and can result in brain damage as well as vascular collapse and shock. When these dogs come in, we start an IV catheter (running the fluid line through a bowl of icy water) and administer acepromazine in *low* IV as a vasodilator while simultaneously setting up the cold bath. Some dogs need IV steroids as well. The vast majority of dogs make it if caught quickly and the temperature is reduced, but some dogs can end up with permanent organ damage.

The shorter-faced breeds of dogs are at particular risk for heat stroke because a large part of the cooling action via panting comes from the passage of hot air through the nasal/mouth passages before entering the lungs and the shorter faced dogs cannot cool this air as efficiently as a dog with a longer snout. I had a client whose pug heatstroked and died in less than 15 minutes outside on a hot humid day--his owner simply put him out in the yard for a few minutes.