

Safe Summer Fun Guide

Most of us really enjoy the summer months and the warmer weather; however, the latter can also present a host of potential dangers for your beloved pets too. Veterinarians generally see more skin infections (bacterial or parasitic mostly), ear infections and more physical injuries during the summer months. Below are 25 tips that may help you prevent injuries and illness to your pets.

Protect against the sun:

- Please use sunscreen in predisposed dogs and cats. Shield delicate skin. Skin cancer (squamous cell carcinomas, primarily) is the most common form of cancer in dogs and second most common in cats. Even though fur provides some protection from the sun, you should apply a pet sunblock every 3 to 4 hours to the least hair-covered spots: bellies on dogs (especially ones who like to lie on their backs; Bull Terriers, Jack Russells and Staffordshire Terriers are well known for this type of behaviour) and ears and around eyes on cats, which are also areas where malignant tumours are likely to show up. Use products made specifically for pets and which are safe for dogs and cats.
- Keep coats long. While it may seem logical to cut your pet's coat short, resist the urge. "If hair—even long hair—is brushed and not matted, it provides better circulation and helps her regulate her body temperature," says Rene Carlson, DVM, president of the American Veterinary Medical Association.
- Soothe burns safely. If your pet does get burned, apply a thin layer of pure aloe vera twice daily to soothe the irritated area. (Check the brand with your vet first, for pet safety.)

Cool activities:

- Walk with caution. Avoid walking your dog during the day's highest heat and humidity, which is usually between 13h00 and 16h00. This is especially important for dogs with short snouts, such as Bulldogs, who can't pant as efficiently in humid weather due to their anatomically narrowed nostrils and windpipes.
- The next point seems obvious, but we keep hearing of animals that have been kept in hot cars for lengthy periods of time. Please, never leave your dog(s) or cat(s) in the car unattended. Even if windows are cracked, the interior temperature can rise by 7.2°C in as little as 7 minutes. On a hot day, this can be deadly.
- Look out for heat exhaustion. If your dog shows signs of heat stress—heavy panting, dry or bright red gums, thick drool, vomiting, diarrhoea, or wobbly legs — avoid the temptation to place the animal in ice cold water, which can put him/her into physiological and life-threatening shock. Instead, move her to a cool place, drape a damp towel over her body, rewetting the cloth frequently, and get her to the vet as soon as you possibly can. A dog's normal temperature is between 37.5° and 39.2°C, so once the body reaches 40°C, we are in dangerous territory (41.1°C or higher can be fatal).
- Keep it cool indoors. Turn on the air conditioning in your home or create artificial drafts of air by strategically opening various windows and doors. The latter is especially important when you intend to be out of the house for several hours. If it's too warm for you, it's too warm for your pet.
- There are those of us who live very active life styles and share many of our activities with our dogs. In the case of water sports, use a lifejacket. Have your dog wear a life vest in a bright colour in any body of water to help him/her stay afloat and ensure that she can be seen by

swimmers and boaters. Prepare your athletic pet from a young age by letting him/her get used to wearing it in your home/garden first.

- Beware of currents and riptides. If a dog gets in trouble in one of these in the ocean, whether swimming or caught in a wave while fetching a ball, s/he can be swept out to sea in minutes. The same goes for rivers: You need to watch out for currents, even if they're not readily visible, as your dog can be easily carried downstream.
- Practice vigilance in lakes. If your dog steps in a sinkhole, which may cause him/her to panic, you need to help him/her swim to where she can touch ground again. Avoid lakes and ponds with blue-green algae, signified by scummy water and a foul odour. Algae can produce a toxin that may cause severe liver damage and/or seizures within a relatively short period of time, if your pet ingests the water by either drinking from the lake or licking tainted fur.

Swimming at home:

- Act like a lifeguard. Never leave your dog unsupervised near an uncovered pool.
- Create an exit strategy before the tragedy. Teach your dog how to get out of the pool by using the stairs with them 5 to 10 times in a row. The aim is that your dog knows very well where the stairs are, whether actively swimming or accidentally falling in and needs to climb out. In the deep end, consider putting in a pool ramp, to reduce any risk of drowning. Certain breeds of dog e.g. Bulldogs and Bull Terriers are considered particularly bad at swimming and should never be left on their own while having access to the pool.
- Avoid swimmer's ear (ear infections or canine otitis externa). Excessive moisture within the ear canal predisposes animal to ear infections. Prophylactic use of canine ear-cleansing drops is extremely valuable and absolutely essential in active swimming pets.

Keep Pets Parasite Free:

- There are a whole range of parasites which your animal is exposed to, even under normal conditions. Parasitic infections are more common during the summer and can gain access to your pet through their mouth, eyes, ears, skin and pads of their feet. Ask your vet for prophylactic remedies against the common parasites in your area. A whole range of different formulations exist, making affordability and administration a lot less concerning than the danger of losing your pet to a life-threatening infection.

Cooking safety:

- Charcoal briquettes have gone missing in the past. Dogs seem to love to lap up or steal from the grill, and charcoal briquettes can easily get stuck in the stomach, causing vomiting and sometimes requiring surgery.
- Don't share. Braai scraps and fatty leftovers can predispose your pup to a whole range of gastrointestinal abnormalities, causing vomiting, diarrhoea, severe abdominal pain and even rare cases of pancreatitis and death. Mielies on the cob and certain fruit pits (peach, avocado, etc.) can be potentially threatening as they are large and mostly indigestible, which means they can subsequently get lodged in a dog's intestines.

Safe Gardening:

- *Melia azedarach* (Syringa berry tree / China berry tree / Persian lilac / Seringboom) produce berries which can be toxic in dogs and cats. The clinical signs are restlessness, muscle trembling, respiratory distress, Vomiting and diarrhoea.

- *Ornithogalum spp.* (Chinkerinchee / Star of Bethlehem / Tjienkerintjee) are bulbous plants that are commonly acquired by avid gardeners. Dogs digging out bulbs in garden or chewing on plants can be intoxicated and develop a severe diarrhoea and even potential blindness.
- *Ricinus communis* (Castor-oil plant / Kasterolieboom) produce extremely toxic seeds containing ricin, causing severe diarrhoea and multiple organ failure.
- Elephants ear (Olifantsoor), Dumb cane (*Dieffenbachia spp.*), *Philodendron spp.*, *Monstera deliciosa* and *Zantheschia aethiopica* (Arum lilly, Varkoor) all contain calcium oxalate crystals within their leaves which cause oral discomfort to severe pain, salivation, paralysis of tongue, numb feeling of mouth and throat and difficulty swallowing.
- *Clivia miniata* (Clivia) causes salivation, vomiting and diarrhoea.
- *Encephalartos spp.* and *Cycas spp.* (Cycads / Broodbome) are often chewed upon by bored dogs and can cause loss of appetite, salivation, depression and liver damage.
- *Nerium oleander* (Oleander / Selonsroos), *Thevetia peruviana* (Yellow oleander / Geel oleander), *Digitalis spp.* (Foxgloves / Vingerhoedkruid) contain heart toxins that accumulate over time and cause salivation, vomition, diarrhoea, respiratory distress, cardiac rhythm disturbances and ultimately cardiac failure.
- Azaleas are common backyard shrubs and can be toxic for dogs and cats if ingested, resulting in drooling, vomiting, diarrhoea, heart arrhythmias, or an abnormal heart rate.

Don't forget the Garage:

- Lock up plant food. Rose and garden plant food containing insecticides can contain potentially fatal compounds. If your dog tries to eat a bag of it (or soil that's been treated with it), s/he could suffer diarrhoea, profuse vomiting, shock, seizures, and even death. Furthermore, keep away the snail poison, fertilizers, all forms of pesticides (termite and cutworm bait), rat poison, etc.