



Owners should also be familiar with winter-weather products that can pose health hazards to animals. Rock salt used to remove ice from sidewalks can cause cracks and chemical burns on dogs' paw pads. Before taking a dog outside in cold weather, consider pretreating the dog's paws with Vaseline. After walking in an area that has been treated with rock salt, rinse your dog's paws with warm water. Some dogs will lick or chew their paws and by doing so, may ingest chemical thawing agents. Using pet-safe rock salt at home can also decrease the risk of chemical exposure.

Another major cause of winter illness is antifreeze poisoning. People who use antifreeze in their vehicles should be certain that animals cannot reach antifreeze containers or areas where antifreeze has been spilled or poured. Companion animals are attracted to the smell of antifreeze and may even drink it. Antifreeze poisoning is extremely dangerous. Any animal suspected of ingesting antifreeze should be taken to a veterinarian immediately.

Finally, companion animals can face additional hazards around the holidays. Foods such as chocolate, bones from meats, and grapes can cause pets to become severely or even fatally ill. When hosting gatherings, make sure pets cannot reach human foods. If there is concern that your guests will insist on giving treats to your animals, provide guests with a few approved treats to offer instead, or keep cats and dogs in bedrooms away from the festivities. Owners should also be aware of decorations that can shatter or be swallowed, electrical cords, and any décor that could entangle a companion animal. When traveling for the holidays, take your companion cat or dog along with you or acquire a trusted sitter who knows the animal's needs and how to contact you and the animal's veterinarian.

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## WINTER CARE TIPS FOR COMPANION ANIMALS







## Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when an animal's core body temperature becomes dangerously low. Though winter weather poses an increased risk of hypothermia, this condition can also occur outside of the winter months. Companion animals often become hypothermic when left outside in inclement weather, even for short periods of time. However, a dog or cat can also become hypothermic when wet, even if the outdoor temperature doesn't seem cold.

Early symptoms of hypothermia in both cats and dogs include pale gums and shivering. As hypothermia progresses, the animal may stop shivering and become lethargic. At this point, the animal is at serious risk of shock, coma and death. Frostbite can occur in tandem with hypothermia and anywhere on the body, but typically first develops on the ears, toes, nose, and tail. Frostbite is painful and can result in the loss of affected body parts. The best method of prevention is to keep companion animals inside and accompany them when outside.



Cats are best kept indoors at all times, and while dogs still may enjoy time in a fenced yard during the winter, owners must always be aware of the outdoor temperature.

Owners should make frequent visual checks of a companion dog to ensure he or she is not getting too cold. Some dogs benefit from wearing coats and sweaters to keep warm, but these alone will not stave off hypothermia and frostbite. It is especially important for dogs to be brought indoors at night and during rain or snow. If there is no alternative to keeping a dog outside, then the dog's outdoor shelter should be large enough for the dog to enter, stand up, and turn around, but not significantly larger than necessary, as this creates more air space to heat. Shelters should be elevated to prevent seepage of water and the roof should be adequately sloped to shed rain. Dog shelters are best insulated with fresh, dry hay. Avoid using blankets which can hold water. Owners should also be careful to ensure that the dog's outdoor drinking water does not freeze.

Though prevention is best, owners should know how to provide first aid for hypothermia and frostbite. A dog or cat who is hypothermic must be swiftly dried and warmed. Wrap the animal in blankets that have been heated in a dryer. If the animal is still conscious, offering warm liquids to drink can be beneficial. When providing first aid for frostbite, owners must be cautious not to cause further destruction of tissue. First, apply a warm towel to the affected area. Do not squeeze or rub the area because this can cause further damage. Use tepid water to gradually warm the body part. Always seek prompt veterinary care for an animal who has shown symptoms of hypothermia or frostbite.

## Winter Care Tips

Although many animals love winter weather, this time of year presents a special set of risks for our companion animals. We must remain vigilant throughout the winter months to protect companion animals from harm caused by extreme weather, winter-weather chemicals, and holiday-related hazards.

