

## Heatstroke – What to do!

In the past two days, NAFA has responded to 9 canine, 1 feline and 1 bird call concerning the heat and humidity. Most of these calls have been preventative calls and NAFA was able to advise individuals how to prevent the animals from overheating. Visit our webpage – [www.nafarescue.org](http://www.nafarescue.org) – for tips on preventing heat stroke or overheating in your animals.

We are sad to say that one call yesterday concerned a beautiful French Mastiff, whose owner was walking the dog in the heat of the day. Neighbors warned the owners and contacted one of NAFA's volunteer/supporters. By the time NAFA was able to arrive to assist the dog was already in a coma and as a result it did not survive.

**A simple way to prevent heatstroke ... BRING YOUR PET INSIDE WHERE THERE IS COOL AIR AND FRESH COOL WATER.**

The following is information on what to do if your animal suffers from a heatstroke or heat related illness. This information is provided only to stabilize your animal until you can get it to a veterinarian. **Medical attention is extremely important.**



**In simple terms, heatstroke occurs when a dog or cat loses its natural ability to regulate its body temperature. Dogs and cats don't sweat all over their bodies the way humans do. Canine/feline body temperature is primarily regulated through respiration (i.e., panting). If the respiratory tract cannot evacuate heat quickly enough, heatstroke can occur.**

To know whether or not your pet is suffering from heatstroke (as opposed to merely heat exposure), it's important to know the signs of heatstroke.

A dog/feline's normal resting temperature is about 100.5 to 102.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Once the temperature rises above 105 degrees, physiological changes start to take place, and it begins to experience the effects of heatstroke. At 106 to 108 degrees, the animal begins to suffer irreversible damage to the kidneys, liver, gastrointestinal tract, heart and brain.

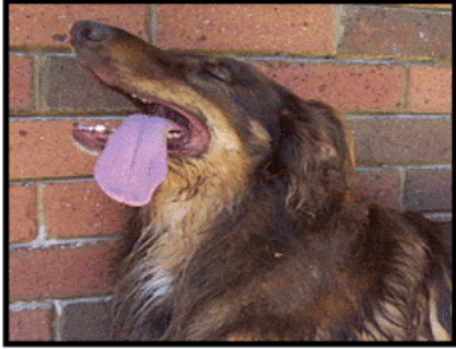
If your pet is experiencing heatstroke, you may observe

- excessive panting;
- hyperventilation;
- increased salivation;
- dry gums that become pale, grayish and tacky;
- rapid or erratic pulse;
- weakness;
- confusion;
- inattention;
- vomiting;
- diarrhea;
- and possible rectal bleeding.

If the dog continues to overheat, breathing efforts become slowed or absent, and finally, seizures or coma can occur.

The amount of damage a pet sustains when stricken with heatstroke depends on the magnitude and duration of the exposure. The longer and more severe the exposure, the worse the damage will be.

## What to do



1. **Pay attention to your pet.** Recognizing the symptoms of heatstroke and responding quickly is essential for the best possible outcome.
2. **Get into the shade.** If you think your pet or an animal you observe is suffering from heatstroke, move it into a shaded area and out of direct sunlight. Apply cool water to the inner thighs and stomach of the dog, where there's a higher concentration of relatively superficial, large blood vessels. Apply cool water to the foot pads, as well.
3. **Use running water.** A faucet or hose is the best way to wet down your pet's body. Never submerge your dog in water, such as in a pool or tub – this could cool the dog too rapidly, leading to further complications, including cardiac arrest and bloating.
4. **Use cool – not cold – water.** Many people make the mistake of pouring cold water or ice to cool the pet. When faced with an animal suffering from heatstroke, remember that the goal is to cool the pet. Using ice or extremely cold water is actually counterproductive to this process because ice and cold water cause the blood vessels to constrict, which slows blood flow, thus slowing the cooling process.
5. **Don't cover the dog.** One of the keys to successfully cooling your pet is ensuring the water being placed on the pet can evaporate. Cover the head or neck only with a wet towel. Don't wet the pet down and put it into an enclosed area, such as a kennel. Any air flow during the cooling process is helpful in reducing the animal's body temperature. Sitting with the wet pet in a running car or inside your home with the air conditioner blowing is an ideal cooling situation.
6. **Keep the pet moving.** It's important to try to encourage your pet to stand or walk slowly as it cools down. This is because the circulating blood tends to pool in certain areas if the pet is lying down, thus preventing the cooled blood from circulating back to the core.
7. **Allow the pet to drink small amounts of water.** Cooling the dog is the first priority. Hydration is the next. Don't allow the animal to gulp water. Instead, offer small amounts of water that's cool or let the animal lick ice cubes. If the pet drinks too much water too rapidly, it could lead to vomiting or bloat.
8. **See a veterinarian**  
Once your pet's temperature has dropped, cease the cooling efforts and take the animal to a veterinarian as soon as possible. Your pet's temperature should be allowed to slowly return to normal once cooling has begun. An animal that's cooled too quickly may become hypothermic.



Even if your pet appears to be fully recovered, the veterinarian needs to check to determine if the heatstroke caused any damage to your dog's kidneys and liver. The effects of heatstroke can continue for 48 to 72 hours longer, even if your animal appears normal.