

Tips on How to Keep Your Pets Warm and Safe This Winter

As you bundle up during this winter season, don't forget to keep your furry friend snug and warm, too. Here's a simple guide to help keep them cozy and healthy during the cold season.

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- During cold weather, pets require increased caloric intake as they burn more energy staying warm. Monitoring portion sizes carefully helps prevent obesity while ensuring adequate nutrition for maintaining energy levels
- Pet owners should vigilantly monitor for hypothermia symptoms, including shivering and disorientation, with immediate veterinary care needed if body temperature drops below 98 degrees F (37 degrees C), using warm blankets for temporary relief
- Certain breeds like Chihuahuas and short-coated dogs need extra protection when temperatures fall below 32 degrees F, while large breeds with dense coats such as Malamutes naturally handle cold better
- Winter pet wear should be properly fitted, avoiding decorative elements that could pose choking hazards, with measurements taken around chest, neck and body length to ensure comfort and freedom of movement
- Protect pets from antifreeze exposure, as even small amounts are lethal — clean spills immediately, wipe paws after walks, and consider protective boots to prevent contact with toxic substances on winter sidewalks

Winter can be a delicate and challenging time for some pets. While some can cope well with the falling temperatures, there are others that may need some extra support. If you notice a significant change in your pet's behavior, energy levels and physical state during the cold months, they could be in need of your attention.

Remember, just like humans, pets also react to seasonal changes. Therefore, you'll need to make proper adjustments to provide your pet with the best cold-weather care. Here are a few tips to help you.

'Is My Pet Cold?' Check for These Signs

If your pet is hesitating to go outside to potty, it's a sign that they're feeling cold and would need some extra protection. Shivering and snuggling close to you during bedtime are also noticeable signs that your pet is affected by the chilly weather. They may also avoid cold tile floors and settle for carpeted areas or stay close to the heater for warmth. According to Carleigh Motycka, a veterinary technician based in Connecticut:

"Veterinarians recommend that pets stay inside if the temperature drops below 32 degrees [Fahrenheit]. If pets must go outside, it may be a good idea to dress them in protective gear like jackets and boots to avoid hypothermia and frostbite."¹

Toy dog breeds like the Chihuahua, terrier and pinscher breeds, dogs with short or thin coats like the Greyhound, senior dogs and those with chronic health conditions are the ones most affected by the cold weather. On the other hand, large breeds with dense coats, such as the Malamute, Siberian Husky and Saint Bernard, are less likely to be bothered by the cold.

Feed More Calories

Your pet's caloric need increases during cold weather; dogs in particular burn off more energy during playtime.² They also tend to move around to stay warm. Hence, you may need to slightly increase their food portions, focusing mainly on providing species-appropriate nutrition. By ensuring that your pet is eating enough, you can avoid weight loss and lethargy, giving your pet the energy boost they need.

Remember that there's a very distinct difference between increasing meal portions and free feeding; Free feeding, meaning your pet has access to food 24/7, is detrimental to your pet's well-being, as it can lead to overeating and obesity.

In addition, always make sure that your pet's water bowl is full — they require as much water during winter as they do during warm months.³

Invest in Winter Wear for Your Pet

Putting a sweater on a cold dog is one of the simplest ways to keep them warm, but you must make sure that the one you get will give them comfort, and not annoy them. Choose one made from a fabric that does not irritate your pet's skin and can be washed and dried easily. Avoid those with zippers, hooks, buttons and other decors that can annoy your dog and become a choking hazard.

The sweater should be easy to put on and take off — this means getting the right size. Before buying, measure the circumference of your pet's chest and neck, plus the length of his body from neck to waist.

The sweater should be snug, but not constricting; it should be long enough to reach their waist, but must leave their back end free. choose one with neck and leg holes that allow your dog to move freely, but not big enough to be able to pull his head or a leg out.

Watch Out for Antifreeze

Car owners use antifreeze to keep their cars functional in cold weather, but this can be dangerous if you have pets around. Antifreeze contains ethylene glycol, which is highly toxic to pets even in small amounts. Even so, pets couldn't help but lick it, as it has an appealing sweet taste.

Antifreeze is very harmful; a single teaspoon can kill a cat, while a few tablespoons can be fatal to a medium-sized dog.⁴ So if you're using it in your garage, keep your pets away from it. Make sure to clean off any excess antifreeze from the floor.

If you've taken your dog for a walk, it's also a good idea to wipe their paws thoroughly, as they may have picked out salts or antifreeze from the sidewalk or road. You can also find well-fitting boots that they can wear when going outside.⁵

Know the Signs of Hypothermia or Frostbite

If your pet has been outside for some time, you need to make sure they're not dealing with hypothermia or frostbite. If their temperature drops to 98 degrees F or 37 degrees C, it means hypothermia is setting in.

Symptoms of hypothermia include shivering, lethargy and disorientation.⁶ Check their body as well; if you notice their skin and gums turning pale or if there is swelling, these could also indicate symptoms of hypothermia.

If this occurs, you need to warm your pet then bring them to the vet immediately. To warm your pet, dry their coat with a clean towel and wrap them in a warm blanket. You can also use the lowest heat setting on your hair dryer. Try putting a warm water bottle near them (but make sure the bottle doesn't touch their skin directly to avoid burning).⁷

Other Cold Weather Tips to Keep in Mind

Pets are resilient, but when it comes to weather conditions, getting adequate care from you is essential to keep them thriving and healthy. Here are additional reminders when properly caring for your pet this season.⁸

- **For pets with mobility and joint issues, provide warm bedding and frequent, gentle exercise** — The cold can worsen joint pain, especially in senior dogs and those with arthritis.
- **Apply a pet-safe moisturizer on their paws** to prevent irritation, itching and cracking.
- **Provide opportunities for indoor exercise** — Staying cooped up inside the house because of the cold weather can be tough on some pets, especially those who are very active. Interactive games will help them stay mentally and physically stimulated. puzzle toys, indoor fetch, and hide-and-seek are excellent activities to try.
- **Keep a pet first-aid kit on hand** — Some must-haves include antibiotic ointment, tweezers, bandages and gauze, saline solution and 3% hydrogen peroxide.

Sources and References

^{1,5} [Better Manchester, November 20, 2024](#)

^{2,3,8} [Dogs Best Life, November 19, 2024](#)

⁴ [BC SPCA, Antifreeze \(Archived\)](#)

^{6,7} [Pet MD, October 20, 2021](#)