

This Summer Mistake Could Harm Your Dog's Skin

A little prevention goes a long way. Remember these tips to ensure your dog will fully enjoy all that this warm season has to offer — without discomfort or risk.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs are vulnerable to sun damage, especially on exposed skin like noses, ears, and bellies. Sunscreen and shade are critical tools for preventing sunburn, irritation, and even skin cancer
- Some breeds, including light-coated, hairless, and short-haired dogs, as well as puppies and seniors, face higher risk to their skin and require extra summer skin care protection
- Sunscreen made for humans can be toxic to dogs; always choose pet-safe formulations and reapply every two hours to maintain effective UV protection during outdoor activities
- Summer skin issues extend beyond sunburn to include dryness from chlorine or saltwater, allergic reactions, insect bites, and heat rashes, especially in dogs with folds or sensitive skin
- Consistent habits like bathing and moisturizing after swimming and scheduling shaded walks will help you stay on top of your dog's skin health and help prevent seasonal discomfort and complications

Summer is a wonderful time to explore the outdoors with your dog, but it also brings increased risks to your pet's skin. Just like humans, dogs are susceptible to sunburn and dry skin due to prolonged exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays.

As temperatures rise and UV intensity peaks, it becomes increasingly important to take proactive steps to protect your dog's skin health. By understanding the risks and learning how to prevent skin damage, you can ensure your dog stays comfortable and healthy throughout the season.

The Impact of Summer on Your Dog's Skin Health

Warm weather can pose several threats to a dog's skin. The most immediate concern is sunburn, which commonly affects areas with little fur coverage such as the nose, ears, belly, and inner thighs. Additionally, extended sun exposure without protection can cause cumulative skin damage, increasing the risk of skin cancer over time.¹

Another common concern during summer is skin dryness caused by high temperatures and exposure to chlorinated or salty water. Many pet parents love to bring their furry companions along when they go to the beach or spend time at the pool; however, repeated contact with pool chemicals or salty seawater can irritate and dehydrate your dog's skin. This can lead to flaking, itchiness, and redness.²

Summer is also a popular time to spend outside in the garden or park. However, allergic reactions to grasses, plants, or insect bites can also be a risk during this time. Dogs may scratch or lick the affected areas, causing further irritation or secondary infections.

Heat rashes, another common issue during the hot and humid season, may appear as red patches or bumps, especially in skin folds or high-friction areas like the armpits and groin.³ These rashes can very quickly turn into painful areas of moist dermatitis (commonly called "hot spots"), which often require veterinary care to treat.

Finally, don't forget about the skin on your dog's feet. During the hot summer months, pavement and sidewalk temperatures soar and can cause painful burns to your dog's sensitive paw pads. A good rule of thumb is if the pavement is too hot for you to walk barefoot on, it is also too hot for your dog's paws.

Certain Dogs Are at Higher Risk of Skin Damage

While all dogs are at risk of skin damage during the summer, there are some dogs that are more vulnerable to skin damage than others. If your dog falls into any of these categories, make sure to provide ample sun protection during this season:⁴

- Dogs with white or light-colored fur and pink skin. Their coats and complexion do not provide as much natural protection against the sun. Examples are Dalmatians and Bull Terriers
- Hairless breeds, like the Chinese Crested, American Hairless Terrier, and the Xoloitzcuintli, are also at higher risk due to their lack of protective haircoat
- Dogs with thin coats, like the Whippet, or with patchy coats are also more vulnerable. Certain dog breeds can have patchy coats naturally, but dogs can also have medical issues such as Cushing's disease that create thin and patchy coats
- Puppies and older dogs with more delicate skin
- Dogs with pre-existing skin conditions (such as allergic dermatitis, scars, or skin tumors) or those undergoing certain medical treatments

According to Chewy, other popular breeds at higher risk of sunburn are Pit Bulls, French Bulldogs, Greyhounds, and Boxers.⁵

Recognizing the Symptoms of Skin Damage

Sunburn in dogs can manifest similarly to that in humans. Keep an eye out for these symptoms of skin damage, and keep in mind, these symptoms can appear from more than just sun exposure. They can appear with exposure to sea water or chlorinated water as well:^{6,7}

- Red or pink skin, especially in areas with little fur, like the belly, ears, or nose
- Peeling or flaking skin
- Itching, rubbing, or discomfort
- Dry, cracked nose or paws
- Sores or blisters

- Hair loss in affected areas
- Licking or chewing specific spots persistently
- Signs of pain when touched
- Ear infections
- Moist or smelly discharge from the skin

If you notice any of these symptoms, consult your veterinarian. Providing immediate attention will help alleviate the condition and prevent infections and complications.

Should You Apply Sunscreen to Your Dog?

Like humans, dogs can also benefit from sunscreen, but you cannot use just any sunscreen. Take note — human sunscreens are not appropriate for dogs, as they contain ingredients that can be toxic to pets. Zinc oxide and para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA) are two examples of chemicals in these products that are dangerous when licked by pets.⁸

Ideally, look for a pet-specific sunscreen that does not have harmful chemicals, is water-resistant (especially if your activities include playing in water), and is safe for sensitive skin. Once you have found a safe pet sunscreen, apply it to areas with little fur, such as your dog’s nose, ears, and belly, liberally. Any areas that have little fur should be protected. Apply the sunscreen frequently and work it well into the skin and coat.

Do this a few minutes before your dog spends time outdoors, particularly between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. — this is when the sun’s rays are the most powerful. Reapply it every two hours while your pet is outside. If your dog is particularly prone to licking, consider applying the sunscreen just before a walk or outdoor activity when their attention is diverted.

Other Daily Skin Protection Habits to Follow This Summer

To minimize sun-related skin problems, incorporate these protective habits into your summer routine:^{9,10,11}

- **Use protective clothing** — Consider putting your pet in UV-protective dog shirts, hats, or visors.
- **Provide shade such as umbrellas, tents, or canopies when spending time outdoors** — If possible, opt for shaded walking routes. Remember, pavement can get extremely hot during the summer and presents a burn risk for sensitive paws. It is also helpful to set up multiple shaded spots in your yard using natural or artificial covers.
- **Limit midday exposure** — The hours between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. are when UV rays are strongest. If it is too hot for your pet outside, consider playing indoor games or enrichment activities during these peak hours.
- **Hydrate your pet** — Always make sure your pet has access to clean, fresh water. If you are going outdoors, bring a portable or collapsible water bowl along with you.
- **Provide summer fun treats** — Frozen watermelon slices (or any other fruit that they enjoy), cucumber slices, and ice cubes made with broth are some delicious yet hydrating and cooling snacks for your pet.
- **Use a pet-safe skin moisturizer** — Once you notice your dog’s skin appearing dry or irritated, lather on a safe moisturizer. You can also consider omega-3 supplements to support healthy skin; talk to your veterinarian to see if this is a good choice for your pet.

- **Rinse your dog after swimming** — Rinse your dog with fresh water after exposure to saltwater or chlorine to remove residues. Dry your pet thoroughly with a towel or dryer to help prevent the skin from staying moist for a prolonged period of time, which can harm the skin barrier.
- **Monitor for parasites** — Fleas and ticks are more active in summer and can cause itching and inflammation. Maintain regular preventative treatments and check your dog’s skin and coat frequently.

Healthy Skin Leads to a Happy Summer

In addition to monitoring your pet’s skin, pay close attention to changes in your dog’s behavior or appearance, and act quickly when something seems abnormal. Heat stroke or heat exhaustion can affect any breed, but certain dogs are at higher risk. Dogs that are obese, senior dogs, dogs with respiratory disease, flat-faced (also known as brachycephalic) breeds, dogs with thick dark coats such as black labs, and dogs with laryngeal paralysis are all significantly more at risk for heat stroke.

Focusing on your dog’s skin health will help you create a strong foundation for a safe and enjoyable summer. By being proactive, observant, and well-prepared, you can give your dog the gift of a healthy, irritation-free summer — full of sunshine, adventure, and tail-wagging fun.

Sources and References

^{1,4,10} [Pet Health Love, June 17, 2024](#).

² [Pet Wellbeing, August 2019](#).

³ [Daily Paws, June 5, 2023](#).

^{5,6,8,9} [Chewy, May 22, 2025](#).

⁷ [ElleVet, April 26, 2021](#).

¹¹ [Whole Dog Journal, April 26, 2025](#).
