

Winter Check List

Just as your car and home need a little special attention as cold weather approaches, so does your pet, especially if it stays outdoors throughout the winter months. Extreme cold, inability to avoid drafts, inadequate ingestion of water or food, or wet freezing conditions are particularly hazardous conditions that can cause illness and, in some cases, death. Colorado winters can be very demanding on your pets with drastic temperature changes occurring through the entire season. So while you are finding your wool socks, putting up your storm doors and windows, remember to help your pets get ready for winter, too! Here are some easy guidelines to follow.

If Your Pet Is Outdoors During The Day

Shelter

- Make sure their house has a door to avoid exposure to the wind and to help keep dry (watertight and windproof).
- The house should be raised off of the ground 2 – 3” and should be in a sheltered location facing south to avoid northern wind exposure.
- Bigger is not always better - the house should be big enough for your pet to sit/stand/turn/lie down easily but not so large that it encourages body heat loss. Ideally the size should be measured against the pet to be housed in it - the length of the house should be 1 ½ times the pet's body length, the width of the house 2/3 the body length and the height 1 1/5 the pet's height.
- Insulation is very important. Straw or shavings are ideal and blankets are adequate as well. Regardless of which is used please make sure it stays dry inside. Check frequently and replace as needed.

Food and Water

- Staying warm means extra calories are being burned so be sure that all pets are receiving their normal amount of food. It may be a good idea to give them a little extra time to eat in the morning if they will not have food available while you are gone for the day. A healthy pet that is receiving good nutrition will fair much better in the winter months than those that are not.
- Fresh water must be available at all times. Colorado winters are notorious for being warm during the day and freezing cold at night. A frozen water bowl can take all day to thaw out. Refresh your pet's water supply every morning and evening. There are heated water bowls at some of the local pet stores available for purchase.

Frostbite and Hypothermia

- Frostbite can cause the skin to look white, reddish or gray, and can appear scaly or sloughing on the feet. Frostbite is most common seen on the outside edges of the ears of pets, tails, and footpads. If you suspect frostbite, do not rub the area, but gently warm it by wrapping in a lukewarm, moist towel. Very hot water or too rapid warming is very painful and may result in further damage to the tissues. Call us immediately!
- Warning signs of hypothermia include sluggish responses, dilated pupils, shivering, or even death. Bring your pet indoors and wrap in warm blankets and bring your pet in immediately!

If Your Pet Is Indoors During The Day

Shelter Inside/Garage

- Even indoor pets have special considerations during the winter months. Be sure that their sleeping area is draft-free and preferably elevated from floor level.
- If your pet stays in the garage, be careful not to leave the car running with the door closed as pets can also suffer from carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Monitor for antifreeze leaks and keep antifreeze bottles well out of your pet's reach. It has a sweet taste which tempts our furry friends to lick this very toxic substance.
- Indoor pets should be monitored carefully when outside due to the fact that they generally have not had the chance to build up a thick winter coat and get cold very quickly.

Food and Water

- Indoor pets will become somewhat less active and may require less food. You can discuss particular feeding plans with your veterinarian.
- Fresh water should always be readily available for your pet even if they are indoors all day.

If Your Pet Is Outdoors At Night

Shelter

- If you **MUST** keep your pet outdoors, then make sure that the animal has shelter that is up off of the ground with proper insulation from cold and wind. Install a canvas flap over the doghouse door to protect from rain, snow, or wind. The shelter should be watertight and large enough for your pet to comfortably turn around in but small enough to preserve its body heat. Straw, wood shavings, and/or dry bedding will all help conserve warmth.
- Louisville Family Animal Hospital recommends all pets be brought inside when the temperature dips below 32 degrees.

Food and Water

- Food and fresh water must be made available at all times.



Exercise

- Pet's still need regular exercise and playtime in the winter months, and it help us, too to get some fresh air! Just remember to check their paws when coming indoors to remove ice, mud, snow, and salts. Ice-melting products and salts can cause irritation to tender paws and animals can experience frost bite just like people.

Toxins and Potential Hazards

- Antifreeze can kill pets, even very small amounts. Be sure to clean up spills thoroughly and immediately. Keep antifreeze containers out of reach of pets and tightly closed. Antifreeze toxicity is very rapid and causes death within 24 hours.
- Make sure that rat and mouse poisons are completely inaccessible to all pets. Dead poisoned rodents are also extremely dangerous they can't reach
- Call us immediately if you suspect something has been eaten that shouldn't have been. Medications, chocolate, toys, strings, cloths, plants, light bulbs, ornaments, tinsel, etc. Be prepared to tell us exactly what you suspect the pet has eaten and bring the bottle or a sample with you to the vet. Early treatment may result in less damage to the liver, kidneys and other organs
- Cats will seek out a warm car engine to nap on to keep warm. Be sure to knock on the hood of the car and honk the horn prior to starting your engine.
- Never put anything such as ribbons or rubber bands around your pet's neck for risk of strangulation or deep, cutting wounds.
- Use a fire screen to protect your pet from becoming severely burned by entering or becoming burned from sparks from your fireplace. Keep pets from getting too close to the fire as thermal burns can quickly result.
- Remove any caked-on mud, salt, or ice from your pet's paws. Be sure to check the warning labels of any "ice-melting" product. Many of them can cause chemical burns on your pet's feet. Keep feet dry and clean after each outing.

Some Animals Are Simply Not Meant To Be Outside When The Weather Is Cold. Kittens, Puppies, Older Pets, Sick Pets, Or Pets With Very Little Fur or Fat Should Be Kept Inside With Your During These Cold Winter Months. If You Are Not Sure, Error On The Side Of Conservation And Warmth!

Have A Happy Holiday Season!

