



## **Cold Weather Safety Tips**

### **Outdoor Activity**

Trips outdoors should be short during the winter months when it is extremely cold. Dogs do need exercise and long walks can be an excellent outlet in any weather; however several shorter walks on extremely cold days may be better tolerated by your dog.

Dogs should remain leashed and supervised when outdoors throughout the year; however in the winter it is even more important to protect your dog from the additional risk of falling into frozen lakes, ponds or swimming pools.

Shorthaired dogs such as Greyhounds, Beagles, Chihuahuas and clipped breeds may be dressed in protective clothing if your dog finds the cold weather difficult to endure.

Wipe off your dog's foot pads and stomach fur after returning from the outdoors.

Pets that spend a greater amount of time outdoors may also require more food and water.

If you take your pet outside in snowy or icy weather, be sure to check his/her paws for cuts or ice balls. After walking on pavement treated with salt or chemical snow melt, wipe your pet's paw with a damp cloth. She/he can ingest salt, antifreeze or other potentially dangerous chemicals while licking paws and paw pads may also bleed from snow or encrusted ice.

Treating Frostbite – Cover chilled pets with blankets and allow them to regain normal body temperature gradually. Warm water baths, not hot baths, are another good way to gradually warm a chilled pet. Don't use electric blankets or heating pads as they can burn your pet's skin.

Never let your dog off the leash on snow or ice, especially during a winter snowstorm- dogs can lose their scent and easily become lost. More dogs are lost during the winter than during other seasons, so make sure yours always wears ID tags.

Life Jackets: use a dog-specific life jacket on your dog if he/she will be on or near frozen water.

### **Shelter During Cold Weather**

No matter what the weather, the best way to ensure the comfort and safety of your pet is to keep it where he/she is comfortable and safe in your house. Your pet should have easy access to your house during weather extremes: the hot, humid days of summer or the icy, cold days of winter. A cozy dog or cat bed with a warm blanket or pillow is perfect.

If your pet isn't used to being indoors, he or she may not know the rules and demonstrate normal, but destructive, behaviors such as chewing and clawing. Just be sure to keep houseplants and valuables out of reach.

The ideal place for your pets in cold weather is indoors where they have shelter from cold temperatures, drifting snow and ice. Outdoor pets require shelter with insulation such as straw or hay and fresh food and water.

As always cats should stay inside. Since cats left outdoors may stay warm in car wheel wells or under hoods, you should awaken any sleeping animals by rapping on your car hood before starting the car engine.

Outdoor shelters for pets should be dry, secure from wind and only large enough for them to stand up, turn around and lie down. The shelter floor should also be elevated from ground level and have dry bedding such as hay, straw or newspaper. Do NOT use cloth bedding which, when wet, can freeze and make your pet even colder! A steady water supply should be provided in plastic bowls and checked on so that it does not freeze. Safe pet water heaters can be purchased at pet supply stores.

Outdoor rabbits should be moved into a garage or basement if possible, as winter weather can be dangerous to their health. If this is not possible, add extra hay to the cage(s) and cover the cage(s) with outdoor-grade plastic for protection.

## Winter Chemicals

**Antifreeze and Windshield Washer Fluid:** Antifreeze products containing ethylene glycol are highly toxic and can produce life-threatening kidney damage, even in small amounts. For example, just one tablespoon of 50-50 diluted antifreeze can be lethal to a 10-pound cat, and as little as 4 ounces in a 20-pound dog could be fatal. Many windshield washer products contain methanol, which if ingested can cause drooling, vomiting, drunkenness and severe central nervous system depression. While methanol can cause blindness in humans, it does not appear to have this effect in cats and dogs. Antifreeze (containing ethylene glycol) poses a special danger to pets in winter. Both dogs and cats are attracted by the sweet taste, and mere teaspoonfuls can cause kidney damage or death.

**If you keep cars and pets in your garage:** be sure your radiator does not leak. If you suspect your pet has ingested antifreeze, contact your veterinarian immediately.

**Ice Melts:** Ice melt products may contain ingredients that can be very irritating to the skin and gastrointestinal tract, and could also potentially result in more severe effects including depression, weakness, disorientation, low blood pressure, cardiac problems, seizures, coma and even death depending on the type of ice melt and circumstances of exposure. Please use an ice melt that is "pet safe"—if you have questions about the ice melt you are using, ask your veterinarian about its safety for your pets.

**Rodenticides:** Depending on the type of rodenticide, if ingested potentially serious or even life-threatening problems can result, such as bleeding, seizures, or damage to the kidneys and other vital

organs. When using any rodenticide it is important to place the product in areas that are completely inaccessible to companion animals.

**Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:** Carbon Monoxide Poisoning is another potential problem for pets kept in the garage with vehicles during winter months. Never start your car and let it warm up in the garage unless you remove your pet during this time.

## Travel

Traveling with your dog or cat can be a very enjoyable experience. Below we have provided some helpful information to make your trip in your truck or car a safe one for both you and your pet.

**Restraining Your Dog or Cat in Your Car:** Unable to brace themselves against swerves and turns, animals in cars and trucks can be thrown against dashboards, windows or floors. A slam on the brakes at 30 mph means a 50 pound dog could lunge forward with a force equivalent to being pushed by almost nine 170 pound men, safety researchers have calculated. Loose cats and small dogs can climb under seats interfering with the driver's ability to operate the gas and break pedals properly, climb onto the driver's lap and impede his/her ability to steer or become agitated and confused and cause biting or scratching injuries to the driver or passengers.

The American Automobile Association (AAA) estimates pets moving about in cars as the third worst distraction while driving. A recent survey by the Royal Auto Club found that nearly all drivers who traveled with their pets had been distracted by them at least once, and about 11 percent of those drivers admitted the distraction almost caused a crash. A tiny lapse in focus on the road is all it takes.

For your safety and your pets; buckle him or her into a special pet seatbelt or carrier. Automobile pet restraining devices can be purchased at most pet stores and are inexpensive. Crates or sturdy pet carriers are also an effective way to restrain pets, especially cats, in cars. Make sure to secure the crate/carrier so it does not shift in the event of a sudden stop. Barriers can also be used to keep dogs in the back seat and are sold in pet supply stores and catalogs.

Drivers should not allow pets to sit in their laps or in the front seat. Pets riding in the front seat can be thrown into the windshield if the driver has to make a sudden stop. In Massachusetts, it is against the law for an operator of a motor vehicle to allow anything in or on the vehicle that "may interfere with or impede the proper operation of the vehicle..."

Protect your dog's eyes and ears. If your dog rides in the back of a pickup truck or convertible or is allowed to stick his or her head out the window, this can cause injuries, resulting from debris hitting your dog's eyes and ears. Also paws stepping on power window buttons can close the window on your dog's neck.

### **Other helpful hints for car travel with pets:**

- Bring a collapsible dish and some water.
- Carry a first aid kit in your car.

- For long road trips, give yourself and your pet a rest stop every two or three hours.
- Avoid leaving pets in a car alone to avoid the risk of theft, tow and cold exposure injuries. A car can act as a refrigerator in the winter, holding in the cold and causing the animal to freeze to death.
- Refrain from smoking in your vehicle while your pets are present.

## **Grooming**

Never shave your dog down to the skin in the winter, as a longer coat will provide more warmth.

When you bathe your dog in the colder months, be sure to completely dry him/ her before taking him/her out for a walk.

If you own a short-hair breed, consider getting him/her a coat or sweater with a high collar or turtleneck with coverage from the base of the tail to the belly. For many dogs, this is regulation winter wear!

## **Transporting Pets in Open Bed Trucks**

**The law:** Massachusetts, New Hampshire, California, Maine, Oregon, Washington, Florida and Rhode Island restrict dogs from trucks or open vehicles. Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 90 Section 22H states that no person shall transport any animal in the back of a motor vehicle in a space intended for any load on the vehicle on a public way unless:

The space is enclosed or has side and tail racks to a height of at least 46 inches extending vertically from the floor;

The animal is cross-tethered to the vehicle (simple, inexpensive cross-tethering devices are sold at pet-supply stores for \$15-\$40);

The animal is protected by a secured container or cage;

The animal is otherwise protected in a manner that will prevent the animal from being thrown or from falling or jumping from the vehicle.

Violation of this law is punishable by a fine not less than \$50. In addition, transporting your animals in an unsafe manner may also, in certain circumstances, constitute criminal animal cruelty pursuant to Mass. General Laws Chapter 272 Section 77.

## **Cats and Puppies**

Keep your cat inside. Outdoors, felines can freeze, become lost or be stolen, injured or killed. Cats who are allowed to stray are exposed to infectious diseases, including rabies, from other cats, dogs and wildlife.

During the winter, outdoor cats sometimes sleep under the hoods of cars. When the motor is started, the cat can be injured or killed by the fan belt. If there are outdoor cats in your area, bang loudly on the car hood before starting the engine to give the cat a chance to escape.

Puppies do not tolerate the cold as well as adult dogs, and may be difficult to housebreak during the winter. If your puppy appears to be sensitive to the weather, you may opt to paper-train him inside.

*Information provided courtesy of [www.mspca.org](http://www.mspca.org), [www.iams.com](http://www.iams.com) and [www.aspca.org](http://www.aspca.org).*