



HEATSTROKE

Heatstroke in Dogs and Cats: Signs and Symptoms

Heat can be dangerous for pets long before it feels uncomfortable to us. Dogs and cats have limited ways to cool themselves, and in hot climates, that puts them at serious risk—even indoors.

Dogs rely on panting, and cats turn to grooming to regulate body temperature. But these natural cooling methods are not always enough, especially in poorly ventilated spaces. If you've ever wondered, "Can dogs get heatstroke indoors?" or "Can dogs get heatstroke at night?"—the answer is yes, and cats are equally vulnerable.

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of heatstroke in dogs and cats is critical. Heatstroke can develop quickly and may become life-threatening without immediate attention. Brachycephalic breeds like pugs, French bulldogs, Boston terriers, and Persian cats are especially at risk due to their restricted airways.

What Temperature Is Too Hot for Dogs and Cats?

It doesn't need to be triple digits for a pet to be in danger. Once temperatures reach the mid-80s, the risk begins—especially with sun exposure or exertion. By the time it hits the 90s, heatstroke becomes a real emergency.

Some common heat dangers to look out for:

- **130°F pavement:** Easily reached on sunny days—always test with your hand.
- **The 7-second rule:** If it's too hot for your palm, it's too hot for paws.
- **150°F sand:** Easily reached on sunny days at the beach.
- **Sunny windows:** Cats may bask, but enclosed sunspots can overheat them.
- **Poor ventilation:** Indoors, hot still air raises risk.
- **Low water levels:** Check bowls frequently; keep them full and clean.

Understanding these daily risks helps prevent dangerous situations before they escalate.

Early Signs of Heatstroke in Pets

Early signs of heatstroke in dogs and cats can be easy to miss at first. Dogs might continue playing despite distress, while cats may quietly retreat and hide.

Early signs include:

- Rapid breathing or panting
- Lethargy or restlessness
- Bright red gums or tongue
- Drooling (especially in dogs)
- Hiding or avoidance behavior
- Grooming more than usual (especially in cats)
- Mild weakness or wobbling
- Disinterest in food, water, or play
- Unusual vocalizations or clinginess

If you spot any combination of these symptoms, move your pet to a cooler area and monitor them closely. Fast action in this stage can prevent serious complications.

Advanced Signs of Heatstroke

Without intervention, heatstroke progresses quickly and can become fatal. You might be wondering, “Can heatstroke cause seizures in dogs?” Yes. At advanced stages, overheating affects the brain, heart, and vital organs.

Advanced signs include:

- Vomiting or diarrhea (sometimes with blood)
- Collapse or inability to stand
- Seizures or tremors
- Confusion or disorientation
- Glassy eyes or unresponsiveness
- Body temperature over 103°F
- Pale or bright red gums
- Labored, noisy breathing

If your pet exhibits these signs, **don't wait**. Immediate veterinary care is critical. Heatstroke can result in long-term damage—or worse—if not treated right away. You may ask, “How long does heatstroke last in dogs?” That depends on how quickly treatment is started. Some effects can last for days or weeks.

First Aid: What to Do for Suspected Heatstroke

If your dog or cat is showing signs of heatstroke:

1. Move them to shade or an air-conditioned area.
2. Apply **cool (not ice-cold)** water to their belly, paws, and underarms.
3. Offer small sips of water—never force it.
4. Put the pet into a pre-air-conditioned car for transport to your vet.
5. **Head to your vet immediately.** Don't delay.

Even if your pet seems to recover, internal damage may have occurred. Always follow up with professional care.

Warm Weather Tips for Dogs and Cats

Prevention is the best medicine. Keep your pets cool and safe with these warm-weather strategies:

Dogs

- **Walk early or late:** Before 9 AM or after 7 PM
- **Avoid hot pavement:** Use the 7-second rule
- **Bring water:** Use a portable bowl for sips on-the-go
- **Provide shade:** Even during short backyard time
- **Use paw protection:** Like booties or paw wax
- **Monitor playtime:** Dogs may overexert themselves

Cats

- **Close blinds:** Prevent heat buildup in sunlit windows
- **Encourage airflow:** Use fans or leave interior doors open
- **Serve wet food:** Adds hydration to their diet
- **Place multiple water bowls:** Especially in favorite spots
- **Brush often:** Helps long-haired cats stay cooler

All Pets

- **Never leave pets in cars:** Not even “for a minute”
- **Avoid enclosed patios or sunrooms:** These heat up fast
- **Use cooling products:** Like pet-safe mats or fans
- **Watch for changes:** Behavior shifts can be early warnings

Stay Ready, Stay Safe

The signs and symptoms of heatstroke in dogs and cats are easy to miss but incredibly dangerous. In warm months, staying alert and prepared could save your pet’s life.

If you’re unsure whether your pet is at risk, contact a veterinary professional right away.