

DOG HEATSTROKE TRIAGE & ACTION STEPS

TEMPERATURE REFERENCE GUIDE

Normal	Heat Exhaustion	Heatstroke Threshold	Critical Danger
99.5 – 102.5°F	102.6 – 104°F	104 – 106°F	Above 106°F

WARNING STAGE 1 -- EARLY WARNING

Act NOW. Move to shade/AC and begin cooling.

- > Excessive, non-stop heavy panting
- > Thick, ropy or excessive drooling
- >Gums bright red or darker than normal
- > Restlessness, pacing, or agitation
- > Refusing to continue activity
- >Mild weakness or wobbly gait
- >Body temperature 102.6 – 104°F
- > Skin feels very hot to the touch

EMERGENCY STAGE 2 -- CRITICAL EMERGENCY

CALL VET NOW. Begin cooling immediately en route.

- >Vomiting or diarrhea (may be bloody)
- >Gums pale, gray, purple, or blue
- >Collapse or inability to stand
- >Confusion, disorientation, or stupor
- >Seizures or uncontrolled muscle tremors
- > Loss of consciousness / unresponsive
- >Rapid, weak, or barely palpable pulse
- >Body temperature above 104°F

SNOWFLAKE EMERGENCY COOLING PROTOCOL -- START IMMEDIATELY

- 1 REMOVE from heat source. Move to shade, AC, or indoors. Turn on car AC immediately.
- 2 CALL your vet or emergency animal hospital. Alert them you have a heatstroke patient so they can prepare.
- 3 TAKE rectal temperature if possible. Record it. Recheck every 5 minutes during cooling.
- 4 APPLY cool — NOT cold — water to the skin. Use tepid 60–86°F (15–30°C) water. Soak through the coat to skin. Target neck, armpits, groin, and belly — areas with major blood vessels. Use a hose, bucket, spray bottle, or soaked towels.
- 5 PLACE cool damp towels on neck, armpits, groin, and paw pads. Re-wet or replace every 2 minutes — warm towels trap heat.
- 6 DIRECT a fan at the wet dog. Evaporative + convective cooling together is the most effective field method. Car AC blowing directly also works.
- 7 OFFER small sips of cool water — conscious dog only. Never force water. Never give water to an unconscious dog (aspiration risk).
- 8 STOP active cooling when temperature reaches 103–103.5°F. Overcooling causes rebound hypothermia. Continue monitoring every 5 min.
- 9 TRANSPORT to the vet immediately. Do NOT delay transport to complete cooling at home. IV fluids and oxygen are critical.

SAFE WATER TEMP

60 – 86°F (15 – 30°C) Cool to the touch, NOT cold, chilled, or icy



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X NEVER DO -- THESE ACTIONS WORSEN SHOCK AND CAN KILL

- X NEVER use ice water, ice packs, or an ice bath. Ice constricts peripheral blood vessels, trapping core heat and slowing cooling. It also risks skin damage and hypothermic shock.
- X NEVER wrap the dog tightly in a wet towel and leave it. Towels warm up and trap heat against the skin. Re-wet or replace every 2 minutes.
- X NEVER give ibuprofen, aspirin, Tylenol, or any human fever reducer. These drugs are toxic to dogs and do not treat heatstroke physiology.
- X NEVER force water into an unconscious or semi-conscious dog. Risk of fatal aspiration pneumonia. Only offer water to a fully alert, swallowing dog.
- X NEVER delay transport to complete at-home cooling. Start cooling en route — IV fluids and oxygen at the clinic are critical. Home care is first aid only.
- X NEVER use cold water enemas or gastric lavage at home. These further damage the compromised GI tract. These procedures must only be performed by a vet.
- X NEVER assume recovery because the dog 'looks better.' Organ damage, DIC (blood clotting disorder), and neurological complications can appear 24–48 hours later. Vet exam is mandatory.

CHECKLIST VET REPORT CHECKLIST -- RECORD ON THE WAY TO THE CLINIC
 NEVER leave a dog in a parked car, even with windows cracked. Car interior reach 120°F+ within minutes. This is the #1 cause of preventable canine heatstroke.

DOG INFORMATION

- Dog name: _____ Breed: _____
- _____ Age: _____
- Weight: _____ Known medical conditions: _____ Current medications: _____
- _____

EXPOSURE HISTORY

- Time first exposed to heat: _____
- Duration of exposure: _____ minutes
- Activity: Resting Walking Running
- Environment: Car Outdoors Indoors
- Last drank water: _____

SYMPTOMS OBSERVED

- Heavy panting / labored breathing
- Excessive drooling / thick saliva
- Vomiting — time first noticed: _____
- Diarrhea — Bloody Non-bloody
- Collapse / unable to stand
- Seizures — duration: _____
- Loss of consciousness
- Confusion / disorientation
- Muscle tremors

VITAL SIGNS -- RECORD EVERY 5 MINUTES

- Time: _____ Temp: _____°F HR: ___ bpm
- Time: _____ Temp: _____°F HR: ___ bpm
- Time: _____ Temp: _____°F HR: ___ bpm
- Time: _____ Temp: _____°F HR: ___ bpm

GUM COLOR (circle one)

- Normal pink Bright red Pale/white
- Purple / blue Gray Tacky / dry
- Capillary refill time: _____ seconds

COOLING ACTIONS TAKEN

- Moved to shade / AC
- Cool water applied — time: _____
- Wet towels — location: _____
- Fan used Car AC used
- Offered water — dog drink? Y N
- Cooling stopped at: _____°F at _____

OTHER NOTES FOR VET

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Medical references: [Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine](#) | [American Red Cross Pet First Aid](#) | [Today's Veterinary Practice](#) | [NIH/PMC Veterinary Sciences 2023](#)



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