

SUMMER SAFETY & KEEPING COOL

Summer time in Townsville starts around October and doesn't start cooling off until about April. It is hot and humid, sticky and sultry, and from December to Easter rains in varying intensities from light showers to monsoonal downpours. Top temperatures have reached 40°C, and it is common to have overnight minimums of 25-26°C and maximums of 32-33°C with high humidity for weeks on end. It can be uncomfortable enough for us humans, but for our dogs it can be deadly if they overheat.

Humans can keep their bodies' core temperature at a safe level by sweating, and as it dries on the skin it creates a cooling effect. We can also seek the relief of air-conditioning and swimming pools to help cool off too. Dogs can expel some body heat to a certain degree, but unlike us have no sweat glands. Instead, their only means of reducing their body of heat is through panting. Having all that hair of various lengths and thickness on their bodies doesn't help either! Double coats can have a certain degree of "insulating" against the heat, but it is the humidity that is their undoing.

Some of the things we can do to help our dogs be as comfortable and safe as possible during summer are :-

- ✚ **Clean water.** Use a sturdy, deep container as a water bowl for larger dogs that can't be knocked over. A stainless steel cooking pot is ideal. Plastic buckets can be ok but clean them out regularly as algae and scum can take hold and grow on the sides. Make sure it is in the shade all day and not exposed to the sun where it can heat up, and needs to be changed at least daily. Have at least two water bowls available, especially if there is more than one dog.
- ✚ **Shade is a must,** and needs to be available all day. Patios, verandas, garages, shade trees, doggy doors to allow access inside a house can all provide refuge from the sun.
- ✚ **Doggy iceblocks.** For a cool treat, make a thin broth from beef stock cubes, pour into a Kong, and put in the freezer. A wonderful cool treat to give your dog on a hot day, and will keep him occupied for as long as it takes to melt. Or put some ice cubes in an ice cream container for him to lick as they melt.
- ✚ **Kids plastic shell sandpits** make great swimming pools. Fill with water and leave under a shady tree for your dog to jump in and cool off during the day. Or a second hand bath tub mounted on a couple pieces of timber to keep it stable makes a great plunge pool.
- ✚ **Cool off** by letting him jump underneath a sprinkler before starting your walk, or douse under the hose or wipe down with a wet, clean rag. Encounters with neighbourhood sprinklers is always a great way to cool down – for the dog, of course!
- ✚ **Cool coats** have pockets of cooling liquid or water built into the sides of the coat and can be frozen or cooled down before putting on to the dog like an ordinary coat.
- ✚ **Swimming** is a wonderful means of cooling off and an activity that has low impact on the joints. Be cautious where you let your dog swim as coastal creeks and rivers from the central parts of the Queensland coast and right across to Western Australia is saltwater crocodile country all year round. Crocs are particularly active in summer as they get flushed out of rivers and creeks by floods or larger crocs, and start looking for mates to breed. Dogs are the perfect snack size for crocs, so always respect crocodile warning signs and avoid those

areas at all times. There have been several reports in the media of dogs being taken or, in some lucky cases, escape with injuries from crocs. Always check with a local if you are new to the area on where you can let your dog swim safely.

- ✚ **Marine stingers** can be a problem for shorthaired dogs with little covering on their undersides. They can be stung just as easily as humans. Apply vinegar and take to nearest vet.
- ✚ **Footpaths, bitumen roads and sand on the beach** get mighty hot under the summer sun. Dog's paws are about the same toughness as the soles of our feet, so it can be quite uncomfortable to walk them on these surfaces. If at all possible walk them on grass or if on a footpath one that is in the shade and may have lost some of its heat.

NEVER EVER'S

- ✚ **Never exercise** any dog in the heat of the day, and never run or jog with him. Walking at this time of year is the safest and more than adequate. Depending on where you take your dog, morning walks should be finished by 7.00, and afternoon walks should not commence before 5.00pm at the earliest. You know how hot you feel, so your dog is feeling it even more and prone to overheating. Dogs have a great way of masking pain or showing signs of injury or weakness, a built-in instinct for survival that meant life or death in the wild. This has been passed down to the domestic dog from their ancestors generations ago, so chances are you would not even be aware that something is amiss until it is too late.

There have been several reports in the media of dogs that have died from heat stress after their owners have taken them for a run, and the first they were aware of anything wrong was after observing the dog becoming lethargic, weak, followed by collapse. At this stage death is almost always the outcome as the organs have already been damaged beyond repair and have started to shut down due to the inability of the body to reduce excess heat.

If this should happen don't put the dog in the car and rush it to the vet. By the time you get there it will be too late. Instead, put him in the shower and let water run over him, or fill up the bath and let him lie in it for at least 15 minutes. By this time you would have phoned the vet and alerted him to your arrival.

Some of the things to look out for are :-

1. Tongue hanging right out of the mouth as far as it can as the dog pants
2. Stare-y eyes
3. Frothy saliva as the dog pants
4. Making a gagging noise in the back of its throat
5. Wobbly in the hind legs

These are all signs that overheating is occurring and immediate steps must be made to cool the dog down.

- ✚ **Dog's in uncovered ute's and trucks** have no way of avoiding the sun, so unless the trip is short and the destination has shade and water leave them at home.
- ✚ **Never leave a dog inside a car** – it is inexcusable and a dog will die just as quickly and painfully as a child. If you can't take the dog inside with you at your destination or stay with him with the air-conditioner running leave him at home. Have a non-spill water bowl (stainless steel is easiest to clean and available from pet shops) in the vehicle and take a bottle of cold water for him to have a drink, or fill up if a tap is near by.