



pennsylvania veterinary medical association

advancing animal welfare and human health while ensuring the vitality of the profession

pvma fact sheet

Winter Safety Tips for Your Pet

As the winter months approach, you need to take time to ensure that your pets enjoy a happy, healthy winter season.

Housing:

It is best to keep pets indoors during the winter months, but if this is not possible, outdoor pets must be provided with shelter. Their home should be elevated off the ground to prevent moisture accumulation and have a door of some kind to keep out winter winds, sleet, and snow. Shelters should be insulated or heated. Water sources may be heated to permit constant access to unfrozen water; thermal units designed specifically for this purpose are readily available. Outdoor pets require extra calories to keep warm; feed your pet according to its needs when the temperature drops. In severely cold or inclement weather, no pet should be kept outside. Indoor pets should have sleeping quarters in a draft-free, warm area with their bed or mattress elevated slightly off the floor.

Roaming Cats:

Roaming cats, as well as house pets and wildlife, may climb onto vehicle engines for warmth during cold weather. Be sure to check under the hood before starting your vehicle and honk the horn to startle any animals seeking shelter inside.

Frostbite and Snow Removal Salt:

Snow and salt should be removed from your pets paws immediately. Frostbitten skin is red or gray and may slough. Apply warm, moist towels to thaw out frostbitten areas slowly until the skin appears flushed. Contact your veterinarian as soon as possible for further care. Snow removal products should be stored out of the reach of pets and small children as their toxicity varies considerably. Also, remember that pet friendly ice melter is available on the market. This type of ice melter contains no salt, is environmentally and pet friendly, and is non-corrosive to sidewalks and driveways.

Toxic Plants and Holiday/Winter Products:

Plants and other items associated with the winter and holiday season can be toxic to your pets. What follows is a general guide. Please consult your veterinarian, animal poison control, and the manufacturer for specifics. Remember, the earlier you seek treatment, the better for your pet!



Low Toxicity

Poinsettia leaves/stems; balsam/pine/cedar/fir; angel hair (spun glass); Christmas tree preservatives; snow sprays/snow flock; tree ornaments; super glue; styrofoam; icicles (tinsel); and crayons/paints.

Moderate Toxicity

Fireplace colors/salts; plastic model cement Moderate to high toxicity holly berries and leaves; bubbling lights (methylene chloride); snow scenes (may contain salmonella); aftershaves/perfumes/alcoholic beverages; and chocolate (dark is more toxic than milk).

Highly Toxic

Mistletoe (especially berries); epoxy adhesives; and antifreeze. Please note that some items have special problems. For example, whereas angel hair is usually considered to be of low toxicity, it can irritate eyes, skin, and the gastrointestinal tract; the content of Christmas tree preservatives varies and often effects depend upon the amount ingested; styrofoam, small parts from Christmas tree ornaments and toys, as well as tinsel, can cause mechanical obstructions in the gastrointestinal tract; snow flock can cause problems if sprayed into the mouth and inhaled; and chocolate, of any type, should never be given to a pet. Antifreeze deserves special mention because even a very small amount can be rapidly fatal to pets.