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Cold Weather Safety for Pets

by

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Winter has come to Vermont and this means colder weather, snow, and ice. And importantly, winter's cold means potential dangers for our pets. Pets are susceptible to the cold, just like people. Some pets are more at risk if they have certain medical conditions, less body fat, or shorter coats. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to help make winter enjoyable for everyone.

- **If possible, keep your cats and dogs inside during cold weather:** It is a common misconception that pets are more resistant to the cold because they have fur. Cats and dogs can get frostbitten, become hypothermic, and get seriously ill if they are outside for too long. Even dogs with thicker coats, such as Huskies, should not be left outside for long periods of time in below freezing weather.
- **If you are not able to house your dog inside, make sure they have the right resources outside:** Your pets should have access to a warm solid shelter and fresh, non-frozen water (either change water frequently or use a pet-safe heated bowl). The shelter floor should be off the ground and have thick, dry bedding: this helps keep the pet warm and dry. The shelter's door should be located away from prevailing winds.
- **Be mindful before starting your engine:** When you are getting ready to leave in the morning, always look underneath your car and bang on the hood. Warm engines are very appealing to outdoor and feral cats, so making noise will make sure any cats who may have taken shelter under your car will abandon their temporary bed.
- **Keep them Wagging on Your Winter Walks:** When you take your dog for a walk check their paws frequently and wipe their feet at the end of the walk. If you check your dog's paw pads, you will catch weather injury right away--paw pads can crack and bleed or ice can accumulate between their toes. If your dog seems to routinely have issues with his or her paw pads consider getting dog boots for them to wear. If your dog has a short coat or seems bothered by the cold weather, consider a sweater or dog coat.
- **Practice Post-Walk Health:** When out for a walk, your dog may acquire antifreeze or other dangerous chemicals on their fur so make sure to wipe your dog down when you return from a walk. This way your dog won't be able to lick these chemicals off their fur. It is also recommended to use pet-safe de-icers on your property to protect your pets.
- **Be mindful of older pets:** If your pet seems to slow down in the winter, they may have arthritis. Colder weather can exacerbate the pain of arthritis and you may see your pet less

willing to go on a walk, not able to jump as well as they used to, or seeking more comfortable bedding. If you see the signs, or are concerned at all, speak to your veterinarian.

These are just a few pieces of advice to help make winter a little safer for dogs and cats. If you have any concerns about your pet this winter or need advice, please contact your veterinarian.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is a professional organization of 380 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.