



SASKATCHEWAN
SPCA

factsheet



COLD WEATHER CARE FOR DOGS & CATS

THE BASICS



FOOD

If your pets spend a significant amount of time outside in cold weather, they will need additional calories to maintain their body temperature. You may need to increase their food intake by 20 to 30%.



WATER

Ice and snow are NOT adequate sources of water. Ensure your pet has access to fresh water by refilling frozen water bowls as needed, or by supplying water in a heated water bowl.



SHELTER

The Animal Protection Act requires that animals be provided with adequate shelter. Cats as well as young, old, and infirm pets should be housed indoors. Outdoor dogs require access to shelter, which for most is at least an insulated doghouse; however, the needs of each individual dog can vary.

(For complete instructions on building an insulated doghouse, see the Ideal Doghouse for Outdoor Use in Saskatchewan Factsheet.)

WINTER HAZARDS

While not meant to be an exhaustive list, the following are some hazards to watch for during the winter months:



ANTIFREEZE

Antifreeze (ethylene glycol) is toxic to cats and dogs. Less than a teaspoon of antifreeze can be fatal to a cat. Exposure to antifreeze is a medical emergency requiring immediate medical treatment. The initial signs of antifreeze poisoning include the following: a drunken appearance, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, a rapid heart rate, seizures, convulsions, depression, weakness, fainting, and/or coma.



DE-ICING PRODUCTS

Some de-icers are toxic to pets and can be ingested when your pets lick their paws. Additionally, rock salt and other de-icing products can be irritating to your pet's paws. Be sure to wipe your pet's paws after a walk to remove these potentially toxic agents.



FROSTBITE

Frostbite is the result of freezing of the skin. When your pet gets cold, blood flow to the extremities is reduced. The ears, tail, and feet are at the greatest risk of becoming frostbitten. Symptoms of frostbite may take several days to appear. Contact your veterinarian if you notice any of the following symptoms: pale gray or blue-ish discoloration of the skin, areas of blackened or dead skin, pain when you touch the affected area, and/or coldness or brittleness of the area when touched.



HYPOTHERMIA

Hypothermia occurs when your pet's body temperature falls below normal; it can be mild, moderate, or severe. Symptoms include shivering, depression, lethargy, weakness, low heart rate, difficulty breathing, and/or coma. Your veterinarian will treat hypothermia by applying warming blankets and possibly warm intravenous fluids, depending on the severity of the hypothermia.



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