

The University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine

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WINTER AND YOUR PETS

Winter ushers in certain tasks: time to winterize the car, check the home's heating system, and clean out the chimney. Winter is also a time to take special precautions regarding your pet's health. Old man winter's brisk winds and chilly temperatures can add up to a harsh season for your pet if precautions aren't taken.

Dr. Dianne Mawby, an emergency clinician at the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine says pets need to be acclimated to the conditions, "If you have a dog that's been inside the whole year and only goes out for 15 minutes a day, don't send it outside to spend the entire day when temperatures are cold. That might be hard on the animal." Dr. Mawby says it's also important to protect pets from the elements that are used to being outdoors, "They need some kind of shelter like a dog house or some type of enclosed area so their body temperature can warm the area. Keep their bed off the ground. Outside pets also have more energy requirements in cold weather so they may need additional food, but don't go overboard." Keep a constant supply of fresh water available to your pet and make sure it isn't frozen.

Some animals will seek warmth in a vehicle's engine. Bang on the hood or honk the horn before starting your vehicle. It is also a good idea to check the area for antifreeze. "Antifreeze is very toxic to dogs and cats. It's sweet and the animals like the taste," says Dr. Mawby, "Antifreeze can be toxic to the kidneys and cause acute renal failure. If you see your pet drinking or licking antifreeze off the pavement, take it to the vet as soon as possible." The longer the wait before an animal is taken to the vet the worse the prognosis is because antifreeze damages the kidneys and that damage cannot be reversed.

The first few hours after ingesting antifreeze the animal acts like it is drunk and staggers. The next day the animal usually begins to vomit and has diarrhea as the result of the kidneys failing. For more information talk to your veterinarian.