

Baby, It's Cold Outside – for Your Dog

Cold-weather safety info can save your canine friend.

Posted: December 28, 2008, 5 a.m. EST

The Washington Humane Society wants to make dogs owners aware of the dangers associated with leaving their pets outdoors for prolonged periods of time during winter.

Although dogs evolved as outdoor creatures, they are not impervious to the elements.

Keep the following in mind when caring for your dog during coming low temperatures.

*Dogs should not be left outdoors in freezing weather. They should only be taken out to relieve themselves and for brief periods of exercise. Small and short-coated dogs may benefit from a doggie sweater during outdoor excursions.

*The onset of hypothermia can vary depending on a dog's size. Symptoms include weak pulse, dilated pupils, extreme shivering, pale or blue mucous membranes, a body temperature below 95-degrees Fahrenheit, stupor, and unconsciousness. If not treated, hypothermia may result in neurological and heart problems, kidney failure, or death.

*Doghouses need to be protected from extreme temperature drops and wind chill, as well. A doghouse must be draft-free, facing away from the wind, have a doorway covered by a flap of waterproof fabric or heavy plastic, large enough for a dog to lie down in comfortably, but small enough to retain body heat, and raised off the ground a few inches with a cedar- or straw-covered floor. Only Nordic breeds should be left outside to use a doghouse in winter.

*Wipe your pet's feet with a damp towel before going indoors to remove any de-icing chemicals that may be present. Chemicals may not be visible and can irritate your pet's feet.

*Wipe up spilled antifreeze immediately as it is harmful if swallowed.