

## How to Keep Dogs Safe During Fourth of July

**Veterinarians offer tips to help keep your dog calm during fireworks and festivities.**

Posted: July 3, 2009, 5 a.m. EDT

In honor of the Fourth of July, a day of energetic festivities often involving fireworks and loud noises, veterinarians are promoting tips on how to keep dogs calm during the holiday weekend.

Rolan Tripp, DVM, founder of the Animal Behavior Network defines noise phobia, a common problem during Fourth of July, as “an excessive, unreasonable fear response to specific loud noises. It is more common in dogs than cats and the most common noise phobias are to fireworks and thunder.”

For mild cases or as prevention to fireworks phobia, Tripp suggests what he calls a “Fireworks Party.” Starting a day or two before July 4 either fast or feed only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the early meal to your pet. Then at the first faint of fireworks, respond with a happy, “It’s a fireworks party!” Then offer a treat for your dog. From there on out, every boom triggers a “party snack” until the dog “happily” waits for the next boom.

“The idea is to turn the fear into joy,” Tripp said.

A dog appeasing pheromone collar can also be added, he said.

For moderate to severe cases, those who do not have a response to the “party plan,” Tripp suggests medicating the pet for several hours on days when fireworks are expected. He recommends asking veterinarians about benzodiazepines, also known as “Benzo” or “Dog Calming Pill.”

Lorraine Corriveau, DVM, a wellness veterinarian at Purdue University’s School of Veterinary Medicine, also suggests tips for lowering the noise stress of pets during Fourth of July fireworks.

“Owners must use common sense when they allow pets to join the festivities,” Dr. Corriveau said. “Some dogs like chasing those spinning and swirling objects on the ground. Others fear loud noises. Owners can use simple tricks like putting cotton in their pets’ ears to muffle the sound.”

Other tips include: Don’t leave pets alone outdoors, even if tethered or in a fenced yard. Keep small pets indoors, preferably in a room without windows. Make sure all sharp objects are removed from enclosures. Turn on the radio or TV for distraction. Do not take pets to fireworks shows. Do not leave a pet unattended. Keep pets on a leash or in a carrier if they must be outside. Protect animals from children who may not realize that waving sparklers or setting off “safe” firecrackers could upset pets. Keep identification tags current. Sedate dogs if needed. Talk to your veterinarian in advance if your dog may need to be sedated. Desensitize the pet by playing CDs that contain noises of thunderstorms, fireworks or gunshots ahead of time. Pick up leftover sparklers and other sharp objects when the festivities are over.