

# Hot Summer Temperatures Coupled With High Humidity Can Overheat Dogs

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*MANHATTAN -- High humidity and soaring temperatures make for hot dogs.*

The old saying that it's not the heat but the humidity that makes summer days so miserable is particularly apt when it comes to dogs and their well-being. According to Dr. William Fortney, assistant professor of clinical sciences in the College of Veterinary Medicine at Kansas State University, dogs become less efficient at cooling themselves as the humidity rises. "Just like people, dogs are cooled by evaporation. The problem with high humidity is that it decreases evaporation and slows down the cooling process," Fortney said. "This time of year we hear a lot about the heat index, which is a measurement of both the temperature and the humidity level, and that is what an owner needs to pay close attention to." There are other factors that hinder canines' ability to cool themselves. They only have sweat glands on the pads of their feet and on their nose, which are inadequate for cooling during hot and humid days, Fortney said. "Panting helps dogs cool themselves but they still aren't as efficient at cooling themselves as people are," Fortney added. "A dog's heavy coat also works against the cooling process which makes them that much more prone to heat exhaustion." Fortney said there are several stages a dog suffering from heat exhaustion goes through. Heavy panting is the first. That soon gives way to huffing and puffing and the dog will lie down or collapse. If left untreated it will slip into unconsciousness and die. The first step pet owners should take if their dog is suffering from heat exhaustion is to cease all activity, get the animal out of the sun and give it water, Fortney said. "The owner can then put the dog in the bath tub or let the garden hose run for a few seconds and then spray the dog down. Then it can be placed in front of a fan which will aid in evaporation," Fortney said. "Ice bags can also be placed around the dog's head and neck." Fortney also said it is important to start the cooling process as soon as possible. "A person's first reaction might be to jump in the car and get the dog to a veterinarian, but in a case of heat exhaustion this is the wrong thing to do," Fortney said. "When a dog's temperature has reached 108 or 110 degrees it can only take a couple of minutes before brain damage can occur. The car ride could take five to 10 minutes, so the owner needs to cool the dog down before taking it to a veterinarian." There are several activities that can cause heat exhaustion in dogs, such as running, being outside for an extended period of time or just sitting in the sun for too long. However, Fortney said that the main cause for over-heated dogs is an avoidable situation that is all too common. "A lot of the heat exhaustion cases we see are a result of dogs being left in a car," Fortney said. "A person can't crack the windows enough to cool down the dog without letting it out of the car. This is the worst case scenario and it only takes a few minutes before it becomes a matter of life and death."

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Because of the way dogs cool themselves, they are more susceptible to heat exhaustion than humans. Below are some steps for the identification and treatment of heat exhaustion.

## **Symptoms of heat exhaustion:**

- \* Heavy panting
- \* Dog begins huffing and puffing or gasping for air
- \* Dog begins to weave when it walks because of dizziness
- \* Dog lays down or collapses and can't get up
- \* Dog becomes unconscious

Depending on the seriousness of the situation, these are the steps an owner should take if your dog is suffering from heat exhaustion:

- 1. Move the dog out of the sun and into the shade or into an air-conditioned building.**
- 2. Give the dog water to drink.**
- 3. Rinse the dog off either in the bath tub or with a garden hose.**
- 4. Place the dog in front of a fan while it is still damp.**
- 5. Place ice bags around the dog's head and neck.**
- 6. Take the dog to the veterinarian only after the dog has been cooled down.**