

## Burr its cold outside

Just like the heat in the summer can be too much on our furry friends, so can the cold during the winter. It is a common belief that dogs and cats are resistant to cold weather because of their fur, however this is not true. Like people, cats and dogs are susceptible to frostbite and low body temperatures (known as hypothermia) and therefore need access to warmer environments during the winter months. So as we continue through this chilly season, below are some tips to keep your pet(s) safe.

Time outside may need to be shortened, such as shorter walks or play time at the park. Though long-haired or thick-coated dogs can be more cold-tolerant, that coat is not guaranteed to be a shield against freezing temperatures, rain or wind. Use caution if you have arthritic or elderly pets, as they may have a more difficult time walking on snow or ice, and therefore are more prone to slipping and falling. Additionally, arthritic pets may experience more stiffness as a result of the cold weather and moving around less, similar to people. Pets with conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, or hormonal imbalances may have a harder time regulating their body temperature secondary to their disease, and consequently may be more susceptible to complications from the weather.

Some additional things to consider include checking your vehicle prior to starting it, as warm engines can draw outdoor cats under your car. To potentially save a life, always honk your horn before starting the engine to alert any cat that may be under your hood. Also, remember to use pet-safe de-icing products and clean up any antifreeze spills quickly as that can be fatal if consumed by dogs or cats. Always keep pets away from frozen ponds, lakes and streams as the ice may not be able to hold their weight. Be sure to wipe down your pet's feet, legs and belly to remove any snow, ice, salt and/or de-icing chemicals that may have accumulated. If you have pets that typically spend most, if not all of their days outside, please ensure they have access to a warmer environment such as heated dog house, cat house, porch, basement or garage to quickly and easily seek shelter in.

Signs to look out for that indicate your pet may be suffering from the cold and may need to be seen by a veterinarian range from whining, shivering, slow and/or stiff movements, weakness, or abnormal areas (such as discoloration) of their skin and paws. Problems such as frostbite can often take several days to manifest, so prevention is key.

So as we wait on the first signs of spring to arrive, don't forget to check on your four legged family members who are without this winter's most fashionably warm attire.