

## Winter Safety Tips

Pets that spend time outdoors are exposed to various environmental and physical dangers that change with the seasons. In the winter, it's important to be aware of not only the weather but also seasonal household products—and even decorations—that can pose hazards to your pet. Here are some basic precautions that you can take to help keep your pet safe and healthy during the winter months.

### Keep Your Pet Warm and Dry

- Pets that spend a lot of time outdoors during the winter months use more calories in order to stay warm. Giving your pet a higher-quality, protein-rich food will help him or her stay warm and healthy. If your pet has any medical problems, consult your veterinarian before changing diets.
- If you have a shelter in your yard (for dogs or cats), insulate the interior. A thick layer of straw makes good insulation. Heated pet mats are also helpful. Use only heated products that are approved for pets. Pets should not be left outside for long periods of time in the winter and should always have the option of coming inside.
- Frostbite and hypothermia (low body temperature) can affect cats and dogs as well as people. If weather alerts recommend that people stay indoors in your area, it is a good idea to bring your pet indoors, too. If your pet cannot be brought indoors, a garage or



Doghouses like this one need insulation to provide more protection in the winter.

mud room can provide enough shelter in some cases.

- When walking your dog, keep him or her away from frozen water. Dogs can fall through thin ice into freezing water and may suffer hypothermia or drown.
- Cats and dogs that live outdoors depend on people for their warmth and survival during the winter months. Special steps need to be taken to keep these animals safe. For example, animals need a constant supply of fresh, unfrozen water. Heated water bowls can keep water from freezing in the winter. Alternatively, water should be kept in a covered, enclosed space to prevent it from freezing quickly.

### Be Aware of Heating Hazards

- Burning candles, fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, and space heaters create the potential for burns and smoke inhalation. The flickers and warmth of a fire can be an attraction for pets; therefore, animals should not be left alone in a room with open flames or hot electric elements. When these items are in use, monitor your pet at all times to keep him or her from getting burned or possibly starting a house fire.
- Carbon monoxide poisoning can be

### More Cold-Weather Tips

The ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) has more cold-weather tips at its website: [www.aspc.org](http://www.aspc.org). Additional information about toxic houseplants, antifreeze, and other winter toxins is available at <http://www.aspc.org/pet-care/poison-control/>.

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### Common Holiday Hazards

The holidays bring all sorts of new items into the home, such as decorations, plants, and food. Some of these pose potential hazards to dogs and cats. Don't let an emergency spoil your festivities!

- **Electric cords:** Keep all electric cords securely taped down or out of reach of your pet. Dogs and cats may chew dangling wires and be burned or electrocuted.
- **Ornaments:** Hang ornaments out of reach of your pet. Dogs, especially, may eat ornaments or wire hangers, which can get caught in the stomach and intestines.
- **Chocolate:** Keep all holiday food safe from your pet. Chocolate contains ingredients (e.g., caffeine) that can be lethal to dogs and cats.
- **Tinsel, ribbon, and string:** Make sure these are kept out of reach and properly disposed of. If swallowed, any of these can require emergency surgery to remove. Tinsel also has sharp edges that can cut the mouth.
- **Lilies, other flowers, and houseplants:** Prevent your pets from eating plants or flower arrangements. Lilies are very poisonous to cats.
- **Christmas tree:** Put the tree in a pet-safe room or monitor your pet when he or she is around the tree. Dogs and cats may eat the needles (even from artificial trees) or drink the water at the base of the tree, which can be toxic (especially if it contains preservatives).

a threat to pets as well as people. Furnaces, gas water heaters, and gas/kerosene space heaters should always be evaluated for any leakage. Because pets tend to be in the house for longer periods of time during the winter, they can be exposed to carbon monoxide leaks for longer, which may cause serious health issues or death. Checking smoke detectors and purchasing smoke detectors that detect increases in carbon monoxide are good ways to help

protect your pets and family. Car exhaust is another source of carbon monoxide. Pets should never be left in cars with the motor running or in a garage with a running car.

- Outdoor cats may seek warmth under car hoods and can be injured or killed by the car's fan belt. Before getting into your car, knock loudly on the hood to ensure that a cat is not hiding beneath.

### Watch Out for Winter Toxins

**Antifreeze.** Also known as *ethylene glycol*, antifreeze is one of the most common and dangerous winter toxins. Antifreeze is highly poisonous—particularly to cats—and dogs and cats can be attracted to its sweet smell and taste. Signs such as vomiting, loss of coordination, and depression can appear within 1 hour of a pet drinking antifreeze. The kidneys are most severely affected. Acute kidney failure can occur in cats within 12 to 24 hours after ingestion of antifreeze, so it is important to bring your pet to us immediately if you suspect he or she has drunk even a small amount of antifreeze.

**Salt and chemical ice melts.** Cats and dogs that walk on “de-iced” sidewalks or pathways can have chapped, dry, painful paws. When they lick their paws, they can be exposed to toxic chemicals found in some ice melts. Pet-safe ice melt products can be purchased at most home improvement and pet stores. However, not everyone uses these products, so it is important to wash your pet's feet with a warm cloth after he or she comes in from being outside.

In many cases, if your pet has eaten or drunk something toxic, warning signs will include gastrointestinal problems, such as vomiting and diarrhea. Other signs may include tiredness and lack of appetite. If your pet shows any of these signs, or if you think he or she has eaten something dangerous but is not showing any signs yet, please call us right away. Treating your pet as soon as possible is essential!

We will be glad to answer any questions you have about your pet's health. Let's work together to make sure your entire family has a happy, healthy holiday season!