

Heatstroke Explained

Family Matters

Heatstroke is one of the few emergencies where **minutes can make the difference between life and death**.

Every summer, we see dogs become critically ill—not because their owners don't care, but because they didn't realise how quickly heatstroke can develop.

At Amity, we believe that heatstroke is largely preventable through education. Our purpose is to **Empower You Through Education**, helping you recognise the danger early and know exactly what to do.

What Is Heatstroke?

Heatstroke occurs when your pet's body temperature rises so high that they can no longer cool themselves effectively.

As their temperature continues to climb, vital organs including the brain, heart, kidneys and liver begin to suffer damage.

Without prompt treatment, heatstroke can be fatal.

Which Pets Are Most at Risk?

Any dog can develop heatstroke, but the risk is higher in:

- Flat-faced breeds such as Bulldogs, Pugs and French Bulldogs.
- Overweight pets.
- Senior pets.
- Very young puppies.
- Dogs with heart or breathing problems.
- Long-haired breeds.
- Dogs exercising in warm weather.

Cats can also suffer heatstroke, although it is much less common.

It's Not Just About Hot Cars

Leaving a dog in a hot car is extremely dangerous, but it's only one cause of heatstroke.

Many cases occur during:

- Walks on warm days.
- Vigorous exercise.

- Playing in the garden.
- Warm, poorly ventilated rooms.
- Humid weather.

If it's too hot for you to exercise comfortably, it's probably too hot for your dog as well.

What Are the Signs?

Early recognition is critical.

Signs include:

- Excessive panting.
- Thick saliva or drooling.
- Bright red gums.
- Weakness.
- Vomiting.
- Diarrhoea.
- Confusion.
- Collapse.
- Seizures.

Don't wait for collapse before seeking help.

Heatstroke has already become very serious by that stage.

What Should I Do?

If you suspect heatstroke:

- Move your pet immediately into a cool, shaded area.
- **Wet before Vet.**
- Begin cooling **immediately** using water.
- Pour water generously over the body, particularly the belly, groin, feet and paw pads.
- Place your pet in front of a fan if available to increase evaporative cooling.
- Offer small amounts of drinking water if they are able to drink.
- Contact your veterinary practice immediately and **continue cooling during transport.**

The phrase "**Wet before Vet**" is easy to remember and can save lives. Starting cooling immediately, before travelling to the veterinary practice, has been shown to significantly improve the chances of survival.

What About Ice Water?

For many years, pet owners were advised **not** to use cold or ice water because it was thought to reduce blood flow to the skin and slow cooling.

However, **recent studies have shown that cold water—and even ice water—is not contraindicated** when treating heatstroke. In fact, rapid cooling is the priority.

The most important message isn't whether the water is cool, cold or icy.

The most important thing is to start cooling immediately. Delaying treatment while searching for the "perfect" water temperature is far more dangerous than using the water you have available.

Prevention Is Always Better

Most cases of heatstroke can be prevented.

Walk dogs early in the morning or later in the evening during hot weather.

Always provide fresh water and shade.

Avoid excessive exercise when temperatures are high.

Never leave a pet unattended in a parked vehicle—even for a few minutes.

Every Minute Matters

Heatstroke is frightening, but prompt action saves lives.

At Amity, we'd much rather assess a pet that turns out not to have heatstroke than have someone wait until it is too late.

Remember:

Wet before Vet.

It may be the single most important thing you do for your pet.

Because when it comes to heatstroke, every minute counts.

Because they're not just your pet.

They're family.

Family Matters.

If you need more information, book an appointment with an Amity vet. We're here to Empower You Through Education and help you become your pet's greatest advocate.