

ASK THE VET: “Winterizing Your Pets”

By: Kathy Quigley, DVM

Cold weather can be a real challenge for our pets, so here are a number of things that you can do for your pets to help keep them safe, comfortable, and healthy through the long Montana winters.

- Short haired breeds feel much more comfortable and stay healthier during the cold weather if they have a warm coat or sweater for when you take them outside.
- Antifreeze, used in vehicles during the winter months to keep the radiator water from freezing, is a fatal poison for pets even in very small doses. Both cats and dogs like the sweet taste of antifreeze, so make sure all spills are cleaned up. In addition, products containing propylene glycol instead of the traditional ethylene glycol are available and are much more animal friendly.
- If your dogs live outside, you must provide a warm place for them to protect them from the weather. An insulated dog house is a must! Animals left outside with no protection from the cold are susceptible to frost bite. This is not an uncommon problem in winter and usually affects ear tips, paws, and nose.
- Also make sure that both dogs and cats have fresh water available every day. Electrically heated water dishes are available which make it easy to keep drinking water from freezing.
- Increase your dog's food, primarily protein, if it is engaged in strenuous outdoor activities. If you are hiking with your dog, be aware that extended walks on ice and snow pack can cause cuts and abrasions on the bottom of its pads. Also, be sure to wash off pads, legs, and belly to remove any salt, antifreeze, or other chemicals that can harm your dog.
- Cats will often sleep under the hood of a car on the warm engine. When the car is started, the cat is caught in the fan belt, causing serious injury or death. Make sure you bang on the car hood or check to see that no cats are on the engine before you start the car.
- Never leave your pet in a parked car for an extended period of time. Cars are very cold in the winter months, and your pet could freeze to death in a relatively short time.
- Older animals are fragile and have a very difficult time with winter cold, so do not ever leave them outside for extended periods of time.