

Opinion: Warm weather not always good for pets

By Trista Cunningham

The warm weather is just around the corner and the American Red Cross has some steps people can take to make sure their pet is safe and healthy as we head into spring and summer.

April is Pet First Aid Awareness Month and Red Cross courses are available to teach people how to care for their pets. Dog and Cat First Aid Guides are available with a DVD that teach basic responsibilities like the importance of spaying/neutering and how to give medications, to performing CPR, recognizing if your pet is sick and preparing for disasters. The guides are available on the Red Cross Store.

For a list of Pet First Aid classes available in your area, call 800.RED.CROSS for information and to register.

Warm weather brings special pet concerns with it. For instance, leaving an animal in the car, even for a short time can be dangerous in warm weather.

“The inside temperature of the car can quickly reach 120 degrees,” said veterinarian Deborah Mandell, pet care adviser for the Red Cross. “It’s not a good idea to leave the pet in the car, even with the windows cracked open.”

Another problem for pets when the temperatures rise is heat stroke because pets are not yet acclimated to the warmer weather.

“Animals love to play and may not stop playing, even if they are becoming overheated,” Mandell said.

Dogs with short noses or snouts, like the boxer or bulldog, are prone to heat stroke. This is also true for any obese pet,

a pet with an extremely thick fur coat or any pet with upper respiratory problems such as laryngeal paralysis or collapsing trachea. Even though some areas of the country have already experienced a few hot days, dogs still aren't acclimated to those types of temperatures.

Some signs an animal may be developing heat stroke include heavy panting and being unable to calm down, even when lying down. Their gum color may be brick red, their pulse rate may be fast, or they may not be able to get up. If someone suspects their pet has heat stroke, they should take their temperature rectally. If their temperature is above 105 degrees, the owner should cool the animal down. The easiest way to do this is by using a water hose. They can stop cooling the animal when the temperature reaches 103 degrees, and should bring the pet to the veterinarian as soon as possible as heat stroke can lead to severe organ dysfunction and damage.

An open window or door can be a pet hazard. Pet owners need to be aware that animals may try to get out a window or door, which are more likely to be open as the weather warms. Spring planting can also be a pet hazard – do not use plants which are poisonous to animals. For instance, many lilies are very poisonous to cats. Visit the ASPCA Poison Control web site to find out which plants and flowers are poisonous to animals.

A pet is part of the family. Just like any other family member, pets deserve to be cared for and protected. Pet First Aid Awareness Month is a great time for people to learn how to protect their pet and keep them healthy. More information on how to keep pets in good health and safe can be found online and on the Red Cross Pets and Disaster Safety Checklist.

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