



Tips for a Happy, Healthy and Safe Winter & Holiday Season

To protect your pet during the cold winter months, the Humane Society/SPCA of Bexar County recommends the following safety advice:

Provide a dry, draft-free doghouse if you must keep your dog outside for any period of time. It should be large enough to allow your dog to sit and lay down comfortably but small enough to hold in its body heat. The floor should be raised a few inches off the ground and covered with cedar shavings or straw. The doghouse should be turned to face away from the wind, and the doorway should be covered with waterproof burlap or heavy plastic.

Please be aware that cats and kittens often nap on warm engines. Knock on the hood or honk the horn; then wait a few minutes before starting the engine.

Many plants – including mistletoe, poinsettias, Christmas rose, holly, philodendron, ivy, Christmas cactus and diffenbachia are toxic to pets and children. Please keep them out of reach.

If you put your pets in the garage or basement, be sure to move all toxic substances well out of reach. Make sure all chemicals, paints, & cleaning products cannot be reached by a curious pet. Check your garage and driveway for antifreeze. Antifreeze tastes sweet to pets, but most brands are poisonous if consumed. Should your pet ingest any amount of antifreeze, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Cover the water in the Christmas tree stand. Pine pitch & water can be a lethal mixture and your pet may decide to take a drink.

Outdoor dogs and cats need more calories in the winter to produce body heat, so please increase the amount of food you feed your pet. On the other hand, indoor dogs and cats may get less exercise in the cold months, and will need fewer calories to avoid weight gain.

Always check your pets' paws for salt, ice, and mud. Ice-melting chemicals can irritate and burn the pads of your pet's feet and can cause serious injury if ingested. You can protect their paws by rubbing Vaseline on them before they go outside, then wiping off their paws when they come back inside.

Please do not give your dog any kind of chocolate. A 1/4 pound can be toxic if eaten by a small dog. If you know or suspect that your pet has ingested a harmful or toxic substance, please consult a veterinarian, animal emergency center, or poison control center immediately. The number for the **Central Texas Poison Center** is **1-800-764-7661**.

Keep an eye on the temperature. When it falls below 20 degrees Fahrenheit, it's best to keep your pet indoors. Short-haired dogs, cats and puppies should be kept indoors when the temperature dips below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Keep your pet's coat well groomed. Matted fur won't properly protect your pet from the cold.

Regularly check your pet's water to make sure it's not frozen. When your pet is outside, make sure there is plenty of fresh drinking water available. Animals can't burn calories without a fresh supply of water, and if they can't burn calories, they'll get cold. Also, use a tip-resistant, ceramic or hard plastic water bowl rather than a metal one, as your pet's tongue can stick and freeze to a cold metal.

Keep snow from piling high next to your fence. A packed snowdrift will provide a boost for your dog to jump over the fence and escape the safe confines of your yard.

Indoors, make sure your pet sleeps away from drafts. Areas near windows or doors that lead outdoors may allow cold air to seep in and keep your pet from staying adequately warm.

Consider the amount of exercise your dog receives during colder weather. If your dog stays indoors more, it's probably getting less exercise and may need less food; however, if your pet is outside often it may need more food to burn the calories necessary to produce more body heat.

Compare the amount of exercise your dog receives during the colder months to warmer months. If your dog is indoors more at this time of year, it's probably getting less exercise and may need less food. However, if your pet is outside often in the winter months, it may need more food to burn the calories necessary to produce more body heat.

Information provided by the Dumb Friends League