**Summer fun can be deadly for pets**

While chasing a ball at the park and taking trips to the beach might sound like fun, pet owners are being warned of the dangers of heatstroke this summer, particularly in dogs.

According to Murdoch University’s veterinary expert Dr Katrin Swindells, heatstroke is one of the most catastrophic, and yet easily prevented, conditions that dogs can suffer.

“Dogs are so eager to please their owners; they often won’t stop playing until their bodies can’t take any more. Owners need to watch for warning signs of heatstroke such as heavy panting and act quickly,” said Dr Swindells.

“Days with temperatures of over 30 degrees bring an increased risk of heatstroke – and days of 36C or more make it a lot harder for your dog to cool down. When a dog overheats, the proteins in their cells start to break down, which can lead to the dog cooking internally.

“Dogs can’t sweat – they can only pant, so they need to find other ways to cool down such as drinking water, seeking shade or laying on a cold surface to manage their body heat.

“Heatstroke can lead to vomiting and diarrhoea, bleeding disorders and even brain damage. If the dog survives one episode of heatstroke it has a higher risk of future episodes as the area of the brain that responds to heat is forever changed.”

According to Dr Swindells, dogs most at risk of heatstroke include those with existing airway abnormalities who may snore or have noisy breathing, short-nosed breeds such as pugs that can have structural problems in their larynx, and dogs that have recently moved to hotter climates without having time to adjust.

“Particularly dangerous situations for all dogs include driving in cars if the dog’s area of the car is not air-conditioned or cross-ventilated, and exercising in the heat of the day – even if the dog seems to want to run or play.”

**Watch for signs of heatstroke**

Dr Swindells says it is easy to prevent heatstroke by avoiding activity in the middle of the day and providing ways to cool down, such as large iceblocks or a paddling pool and at least two bowls of fresh drinking water. Importantly, pet owners should monitor their animals for signs of heatstroke.

“If your dog collapses, or is breathing strangely or panting excessively, cool it down by hosing or wetting all over. Spend five minutes at home cooling your dog down, then drive to your vet with your windows open or air-conditioning on.

“If you spend a few minutes cooling your dog at home and then go to your vet, they generally have the best chance of survival, compared to going straight to the vet, or doing nothing to see if the situation improves.”

For more information about keeping your pets safe this summer, please visit [http://www.murdoch.edu.au/Summer-fun](http://www.murdoch.edu.au/Summer-fun)

**About Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital**

Open hours for General Practice 8.30am-6pm
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