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Frostbite on Dogs

Even if they have thick fur, dogs who are exposed to extreme low temperatures run the possibility of freezing their extremities—the tips of their ears, tail and toes. Frostbite on dogs is not usually a life-threatening condition in and of itself, but it does often proceed [hypothermia in dogs](#), which can be fatal.

What to Watch For

Symptoms of frostbite on dogs include the skin becoming very pale with a bluish-white hue due to a lack of blood flow. Ice may also form around the affected area. When the area is touched, it feels very cold or brittle, and may be painful.

When the body part is warmed and blood flow returns, the skin becomes red and there is swelling accompanied by peeling. This is very painful and may lead to blisters or skin ulcers. As dog frostbite progresses, the area becomes blackened, which indicates death of the local tissue.

Primary Cause of Frostbite on Dogs

Frostbite often occurs when a dog is exposed to the cold for an extended period, though exposure to cold water exacerbates the risk of dog frostbite.

In response to cold temperatures, the body naturally constricts blood vessels in extremities to keep the essential organs functioning. This makes those extremities more susceptible to frostbite.

As their exposure to the cold continues, their body will eventually cut off blood flow to the most extreme edges of the body entirely.

Immediate Care for Dog Frostbite

Follow these steps to treat frostbite on dogs:

Warm a towel on a radiator or in a clothes dryer, or using a handheld hair dryer. Do not directly warm the dog with the hair dryer or other heat source.

1. Apply the warm towel to the affected areas. Do not squeeze or rub hard, as this can cause more damage. Do not warm an affected area unless you are able to keep the area warmed.
2. Use tepid water to warm up the affected areas to a temperature of 100°F (32°C), but no higher than 108°F, as this can cause more damage.
3. As the areas thaw, they will redden. If they become dark instead, seek immediate veterinary attention.
4. It is always recommended to seek veterinary attention to make sure there is no other damage and that no additional treatment is required.

Continuing Care for Frostbite on Dogs

Call your veterinarian or the local emergency pet clinic and describe your dog's symptoms. Frostbite on dogs is not usually a life-threatening condition in and of itself, but it does often proceed hypothermia in dogs, which can be fatal.

The veterinarian will likely give your dog pain medication that does not affect their blood pressure or blood flow.

Dog antibiotics may also be required, along with fluids and a warming environment. If a large area is affected by frostbite, amputation may be necessary.

The prognosis for dog frostbite is based on the amount of the body that is affected. Most cases are mild and resolve with only cosmetic damage.

Ways to Prevent Frostbite on Dogs

Dog frostbite can be prevented by avoiding prolonged exposure to cold temperatures. In addition, dog apparel like dog jackets, dog sweaters, dog

boots and other accessories can help to protect dogs, especially for breeds with thinner fur and those less used to cold weather.

Diabetes, heart disease and other conditions that impair blood flow increase the risk of dog frostbite. Dogs with these chronic conditions should not be exposed to cold temperatures for long periods of time. that does not affect their blood pressure or blood flow.

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