

Northwoods Humane Society – Deanna Persson, President

What Temperature is Too Cold For Cats? This subject was addressed by Dr. Joe Alcorn, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, and a member of the American Veterinary Medical Association. This past week has been brutal cold wise in our area. While cats are feisty, resilient, and can generally take care of themselves, our domestic cats need some help when the cold starts.

Determining what temperature is too cold for cats depends on age, breed, fur, health, and body mass. An average daily temperature of 45 degrees Fahrenheit is too cold for cats. If cats remain in a place with a temperature below 32 degrees Fahrenheit, they may suffer from Hypothermia and possibly frostbite.

While there's a recommended temperature for cats, the following may influence our cats' reaction to low temperatures:

- Size and Weight – small bodies have less fat, which acts as the body's natural insulator.
- Coat type – Cats with thick, double-layered coats tend to withstand the cold better.
- Locations - Breeds that come from locations with cold climates allow them to survive in cold temperatures naturally.
- Age – Senior, kittens, and sick cats can't regulate their body temperatures properly as opposed to healthy cats in their prime years. About 90% of cats over age of 10 have arthritis, and cold temperatures can increase pain to the joints.
- Living Environment – Cats who spend most of their time outside have better tolerance to cold weather compared to cats who usually stay in a sheltered place, Indoor cats who have no experience staying outdoors may panic in a cold environment, preventing them from thinking about how to protect themselves.

Hypothermia in cats happens when the body temperature gets dangerously low or drops below 100 degrees Fahrenheit. An elderly, very young or sick cat with health problems may die if the temperatures are well above the freezing point.

When cats suffer from hypothermia, the central nervous system becomes depressed, preventing the heart from pumping blood throughout the body. Signs of hypothermia include: cold, clammy skin, dilated pupils, low heart rate, excessive shivering, slow or labored breathing, slow response to stimulations or commands, stiff or sluggish movements, weakness and lethargy. If you think your cat is developing hypothermia, it's advisable to call your veterinarian right away. You can try to rewarm your pets using towels, although you should not apply direct heat.

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Clothes, especially sweaters, should not hang loosely or have gaps that prevent cats from staying warm. However, clothes shouldn't be too tight, or else cats may get skin irritation or blood circulation problems.

Cats left outside may not be able to get themselves to safety once frostbite takes place. It may take a few days for you to notice the signs of frostbite, so it's important that we know them: Discoloration of the affected skin area (pale, bluish, or gray), blackened or dead skin, brittleness or coldness of the affected skin area swelling, blisters or skin ulcers.

Whether it's an indoor or outdoor cat, it's our job as furry parents to ensure their safety and comfort. These are simple ways to keep our pets warm when the temperature drops.

A good rule of thumb is to set the thermostat between 69 and 72 degrees Fahrenheit when we're at home. Cats with large bodies or thick coats may need temperatures on the lower end of the said range.

We can adjust the thermostat to no lower than 60 degrees Fahrenheit when we're out during the day. Keep the temperature warmer if you have young, senior, or sick cats.

Cats typically have preferred sleeping spots. However, they tend to change places in the winter months, seeking the house's warmest areas.

During the day, we can place their bed near the windows, and keep the blinds or curtains open to let the cat enjoy the sunshine's warmth. We can also set up several beds in areas of the house where sunlight can enter through windows or doors.

Try using a heated cat bed during the cold seasons. Another option is to look for comfortable padding, warm fabric, or even a fluffy blanket. Fleeces and faux furs are also good for keeping cats warm. Aside from that, consider how your cat likes to sleep. If it prefers to stretch out, it might need a spacious bed. If your pet loves to curl up, then consider getting a round bed.