

Northwoods Humane Society – Deanna Persson, President

I really love the winters and the crisp cold weather. I like being in my warm home, the warm thrift shop, my warm art studio and my warm car. My dogs Chip and Lola (little short Terrier types) usually like their morning run around the yard. This past week, the runs have been short or none at all. When I ask Chip if he wants to go out – he goes into the living room and gets on the couch. Enough said. If you are going to be outside in this very cold weather both man and beast need to be aware of the dangers and dress appropriately.

According to the American Kennel Club, left in the cold for too long, dogs can develop hypothermia, a dangerous condition that occurs when the core body temperature drops too low. For dogs, mild hypothermia begins to set in when their body temperature drops below 99° Fahrenheit.

Frostbite can also become an issue at extremely low temperatures. If left untreated, hypothermia can also result in cardiac and respiratory failure, brain damage, coma, and even death. There are three stages of Hypothermia: Mild hypothermia: body temperature of 90 – 99°F, Moderate hypothermia: body temperature of 82 – 90°F. Severe hypothermia: any temperature less than 82°F

Cats can certainly be victims of hypothermia and frost bite. Their body temperatures run a bit higher than humans, averaging 100 to 102 degrees. Most cats are perfectly fine in temperatures dropping into the 60's. Even the 50's can be okay for many. A common guideline according to Purina is that 45 degrees F or below is too cold for cats. Temperatures below freezing present an even great risk.

First signs of hypothermia may be shivering and curling up for warmth are some of the first signs. Other signs to watch out for include the following: Increased heart rate, followed by a slow heart rate. Rapid breathing, followed by progressively slower and shallower breath. Sluggishness and delayed reflexes. Depression. Paleness. Dilated pupils. Loss of consciousness.

While most dogs will only experience hypothermia in cold temperatures, but newborn puppies can suffer from hypothermia in normal temperatures. Small dogs, senior dogs, puppies, and short dogs. If you suspect your dog may be suffering from hypothermia, bring your dog somewhere warm if possible and contact your vet immediately.

A dog with hypothermia will be treated until they reach a normal body temperature. Minimize your dog's movement while they are being warmed up.

- Mild hypothermia can typically be treated with insulation and blankets.
- Moderate hypothermia will require active external heat sources such as radiant heat (in addition to a protective layer such as a protective sweater
- Severe hypothermia requires invasive core warming, such as warm IV fluids.

When severe Hypothermia sets in a dog will stop shivering because their muscle cells have run out of energy. Once the shivering stops, the dog's body temperature may begin to rapidly drop. The chemical reactions that are necessary for normal body functioning in a dog will slow down or stop altogether. The dog's heart rate slows and becomes erratic, and their breathing slows. As oxygen

levels drop in the bloodstream, the dog will become increasingly lethargic and unresponsive. Eventually there will be shock, organ failure, coma and death will follow.

Prevent Hypothermia: A warm dog jacket or sweater and dog booties will help minimize the risk of hypothermia in dogs. However, clothing for your dog should never be used on an unattended dog or as a substitute for proper care, but rather as an adjunct. In general, it is safer for pets to be in an area where temperatures can be controlled.

Make sure your dog is dry before taking them out for a walk. If a dog is wet or damp, these areas are more vulnerable to frostbite. Keep winter walks short when possible and limit time outdoors in extreme cold.

A car can act like a greenhouse in the summer, becoming much hotter than the environment outside. Likewise, in winter, cars without heaters running become rolling refrigerators, conducting cold from the outside. Cars have little to no insulation against outside conditions. So while your vehicle may shelter your dog from the wind and elements, it does not protect from frigid or freezing temperatures. And it can be dangerous to assume that your dog's fur will be enough to protect them from extreme cold.

When in doubt, always consult your veterinarian.