

## Winter Health and Safety Tips for your Pets

You don't need the vet to tell you it's cold and dangerous outside right now. Still, while we're in the middle of one of the worst winters in recent history for Duxbury, there are several things that pet owners should make sure they know:

- 1) **Shovel some pee space:** We see our dogs running around crazily in the snow and we think that they are ecstatic with the whole situation. While this is true for the time they are playing, the cold snow against the private areas is actually very uncomfortable to them. As a result, they are not fully emptying their bladders when they urinate. This leaves residual urine in the bladder that would normally be flushed out. That leftover urine allows bacteria to grow leading to a urinary tract infection. Since this snow disaster started, we have seen *MANY* dogs coming to the clinic for this problem. Be sure to have a good area shoveled low enough for your dog to have appropriate pee clearance.
- 2) **Bundle up:** Between shows about sharks and making moonshine, people see wolves on the Discovery Channel braving the wilderness and cold. Thinking dogs are just cuter wolves, these people can feel that dogs will do OK in freezing temperatures outside. While some dogs are bred to tolerate the cold, the vast majority are not. A pet coat is always a good idea, especially if your dog may get wet while they are out. Pet stores will let you bring your pets in for a good fit.
- 3) **Cars (inside and out):** People don't often realize how quickly their car's temperature will drop when they turn it off. Even with a coat on, it will often get too cold for any pets left within for more than 15 minutes. Use your automatic starter or carry spare keys to allow your car to run if you have to take your pet along somewhere.

Cars are also dangerous for cats, even when they don't ride inside. Cats will seek heat in cold weather and the engine blocks of cars provide a perfect space for that. However, starting a car with a cat in the engine rarely ends with good results. If you park outside, give your hood a good couple of thuds before you get in to give kitties a chance to bail out before you start it up.

- 4) **Protect those feet:** Frostbite is not easy to spot on pets, but it still happens. Feet are the #1 spot where this will occur. Always check your dog's feet after walks and consider booties. These or any protection for the feet are also good ideas as the weather warms up and this mess starts to melt. When the snow's surface melts in the sun, then re-freezes over the evening, it creates a hard ice coating that the dogs' feet sink through. This recurrent scraping of the pads and delicate skin around them will really do a number on critter feet.

You should also be aware of the damage caused by ice melts. While none are incredibly toxic in small amounts, most will cause scalding of the feet over time. Amide-based ice melts, such as Safe Paws, are much less likely to cause damage to the feet or sickness if eaten. That said, these safer melts also do not perform well in very cold temperatures and should be used with caution in areas like stairs where safe traction is more important to pets two-footed companions. Regardless of the type of ice melt used, wash your dog's feet off well after they walk through it.

- 5) Winter weight: Much like us, pets are more sedentary in the winter and tend to pack on the pounds more than in the active months. Unless you are still making regular trips to Bay Farm or the Town Forest, your dog may be in this group. Pay attention to your dog's physique and make sure that there isn't any extra padding forming over their ribs. You should be able to feel them with minimal pressure on the chest. If you're not sure if your dog is gaining weight, you can try holding them on a scale and subtracting your own weight, or bring them into the clinic any time to use our dog scale in the waiting room. If the weight's going up, the meal sizes and treat amounts need to go down.