

Summer can be a great time to get your dog out and into the water, but please be aware of some dangers you can face as a pet owner.

Water Toxicity

Making sure your dog has plenty of water during the hot summer days is very important, but did you know that too much water can be harmful? Water intoxication can happen when a dog is jumping into a pool or lake and gulps down too much H₂O. Drinking too much can cause electrolyte levels to drop, thinning blood plasma and leading to swelling of the brain and other organs. Many dogs will keep their head up when they jump in to swim or retrieve a ball, but even the most experienced swimmer can still get water in their mouths. This is definitely not to say that you shouldn't let your dog play in the water as it can be a great way to cool off and get some exercise! When you do decide to take your dog to the beach for a swim, please be aware of the warning signs of water toxicity.

Early signs of a problem can include mild lethargy, nausea, and slight weight gain resulting in a bloated appearance. Later symptoms may include neurological signs such as a loss of coordination (tripping, falling, or collapsing), dilated pupils, and glazed eyes or lack of awareness of their surroundings. They may also have difficulty breathing, or have an increased heart rate. If your dog displays unusual behavior or symptoms, please contact your local emergency veterinarian as soon as possible.

You can always use a life jacket to help keep their heads above water and reduce the amount of water they might swallow.

Salt Water Toxicity

If your dog loves to play on the ocean beach, heed caution. Dogs don't realize that salt water is dangerous, and excessive intake can result in severe hyponatremia, or salt poisoning. While initial signs of hyponatremia include vomiting and diarrhea, salt poisoning can progress quickly to neurologic signs like incoordination, seizures, progressive depression, and ultimately, severe brain swelling. Hyponatremia needs to be treated very carefully with IV fluids by your veterinarian. Help avoid the problem by carrying a fresh bottle of tap water and offering it to your dog frequently while he's frolicking on the beach.

Pool Chemicals

If you own a pool or hobby pond, make sure to keep those pool chemicals away! Algaecides and chlorine shock water treatment products are generally safe once these chemicals are diluted appropriately. However, many of the undiluted pool chemicals, like chlorine bleach tablets are corrosive because they are bleach derivatives. If ingested directly from the bucket or in tablet form, this can result in severe ulcers in the mouth, esophagus, and stomach, resulting in life-threatening punctures of the GI tract. When in doubt, make sure you always store your pool chemicals in a locked, secure area, and never leave open containers pool-side.

Sunscreen Toxicity

Believe it or not, but sunscreen can be toxic to your pet if ingested in large amounts. Sunscreens contain a few potentially dangerous chemicals: PABA, zinc oxide, salicylic acid (aspirin), and laxatives. Massive PABA ingestion can result in severe gastroenteritis (an inflammation of the stomach and intestines), bone marrow changes, and even liver damage. Zinc oxide generally just causes a mild gastroenteritis, resulting in vomiting, nausea, or diarrhea. Large amounts of salicylic acid can result in gastric ulcers, and

in high doses, even kidney failure. Sunscreen may also have an inadvertent laxative effect also, resulting in diarrhea.

Thankfully, this is pretty rare because pets have to ingest large bottles of sunscreen before it's an issue. Remember that if you apply sunscreen to your pet, he'll likely just lick it off. In general, I don't normally recommend sunscreen unless you have a white dog with a pink nose, live in a high elevation in constant sunshine, house your dog outdoors most of the time, or if your dog has an underlying medical problem (like pemphigus, lupus, dermatitis, etc.). If you need to use it, purchase a child-safe sunscreen and consult your veterinarian.

Flea and Tick Medications

During the spring and summer, flea and tick infestation is at its highest. Make sure your pets are protected with an adequate, safe, preventative flea and tick medication to avoid that itchy, uncomfortable feeling of bites, flea allergy dermatitis, or even tick-borne diseases like Lyme disease, Ehrlichia, Anaplasma, or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. There are multiple different options for insect preventives: from oral pills to topical spot-on treatments, prescription or over-the-counter. Most of these types are either an adulticide which kills adult fleas and ticks, or an insect growth regulator which prevents them from developing into adults. When in doubt, contact your veterinarian about the best type of medication for your pet; the safest types of preventative are often by prescription only. Keep in mind that some dogs have sensitivities to certain types, and others can cause severe adverse reactions if not applied appropriately.

Most importantly, if you're a cat owner, read the label carefully! Some of these preventives contain pyrethrins or pyrethroids (a chemical derivative of the natural Chrysanthemum flower), which are severely toxic to cats when misapplied. Even the accidental application of a dog flea product to a cat can result in severe symptoms like seizures, tremors, and life-threatening reactions!

Stings and Insect Bites

If you're going camping in a mosquito-infested area, consider using a flea and tick preventive that gets mosquitoes too. Only Advantix works for mosquitoes, because of the pyrethrin.

For cat owners, be safe and don't use anything – mosquitoes can't usually get through that thick kitty fur coat, and it's rare for cats to get Lyme disease, likely because cats are such fastidious groomers that ticks get groomed off. Cats are sensitive to any kind of chemical or drug, so always check with a veterinarian before using any product on a cat. If you do notice an attached tick, simply get a pair of tweezers and firmly grasp near the base, which is the head of the tick, and pull it off in one swipe.