

# Canine Heat Injury Fast Facts

Veterinary Tactical Group



1. **Body temperature is not a good predictor of heat injury in dogs. That is, the number alone can't tell you if a dog is getting "too hot."**

Some athletic dogs can tolerate working temperature of 106° F (41.1 °C) and higher, while less fit dogs may suffer severe heat injury at those temperatures. The best predictor of getting "too hot" is their behavior: uncontrollable panting, floppy tongue, slow to respond or ignoring commands, shade seeking, subtle loss of coordination like small stumbling or tripping. The key is cooling the dog *before* heat injury occurs.

2. **When a dog incurs heat injury, *rapid cooling* is the most important life- saving step.**

There's a myth that "cooling too fast could put them into shock." They have severe heat injury (aka "heat stroke"): they're already in shock! BODY HEAT is the immediate life- threat: there is ***no benefit*** to leaving them HOT for an extended time. By cooling slowly you are allowing the life-threatening problem to continue, causing further harm to the dog.

3. **Cooling methods: Ice water is okay, wet towels are okay. Anything that is cooler than the dog is okay!**

Another myth is that certain cooling methods are harmful, slow down cooling, or even cause the dog to get warmer. Some methods of cooling *are* faster than others, and we recommend using those if available (cold/cool running water, water troughs/kiddie pools, ice water, etc.) but in reality, anything that is colder than the dog will cause the dog to cool down to some degree. Wet towels do trap in tiny bit of heat ("wetsuit effect") but cannot actually cause the dog to get warmer. Ice water on the skin does cause some vasoconstriction but not enough to slow cooling or cause any other significant medical complications. Cool the dog down with whatever you have available in your immediate environment that is colder than the dog. Stop cooling at 104° F (40° C) ("Safe temperature") and continue monitoring the dog's temperature as they may drop below normal (below 99° F/ 37.2° C) and need to be rewarmed to keep within a normal range.

4. **Cool first, then transport.**

A 10-minute trip to the veterinarian without first cooling to "safe temperature" (104° F /40° C) is ten minutes longer that you've let the dog "cook." If you don't have a thermometer, allow at least five minutes of any rapid cooling technique before transport. Remember excessive ***body heat*** is the immediate threat to life. The veterinarian is no more skilled at hosing down a dog than you are in the field! Veterinary treatments like IV fluids and antibiotics are secondary treatments that are important, but not intended to stop the *immediate life-threat*. You can do the best life-saving treatment with rapid, immediate cooling.