Heatstroke in dogs

Suspected heatstroke is an emergency. Start cooling and contact a vet immediately. Do not wait for collapse or a particular temperature reading.

Recognise possible overheating

Watch for heavy panting, distressed or noisy breathing, drooling, restlessness or reluctance to keep moving. Vomiting, diarrhoea, weakness, confusion, seizures or collapse are urgent warning signs. You do not need to see every sign before acting.

Act immediately

1. Stop activity and move out of the heat. Use shade or a cooler, well-ventilated area.

2. Start cooling. Pour cool water over the body, keeping water away from the nose and mouth. Add air movement with a fan or air conditioning. Do not delay while finding special equipment.

3. Contact a vet. Have someone phone while you start cooling if possible. Follow the vet's instructions and arrange urgent transport. The Royal Veterinary College advises: "cool first, transport second".

4. Offer small sips if your dog can drink normally. Never force water into their mouth.

5. Get veterinary care. Use air conditioning during transport where available. Apparent recovery does not rule out internal injury or delayed complications.

Reduce the risk

Provide fresh water and a cool resting place with good airflow. Reduce exertion in hot or humid weather. Adapt activity to your dog's age, health, fitness and breathing ability. A cooling vest or mat does not make unsafe conditions safe.

Never leave a dog unattended in a car. Shade and partly open windows do not provide reliable protection. Avoid hot ground and keep your nearest after-hours vet's details handy.

Veterinary guidance

Royal Veterinary College: Heatstroke in dogs and cats

RSPCA Australia: How can I protect my dog from heatstroke?