



Investigating hypothermia in dogs: a guide for law enforcement

Pets left outside in extreme temperatures, especially without appropriate food and shelter, are at risk of hypothermia, frostbite and even death.

Signs of hypothermia:

- o Paleness, lethargy/weakness, excessive whining, decreased respiratory rate
- o Frostbite or tissue damage of certain body parts, such as the tail, tips of the ears or foot pads
- o Ice on body and limbs
- o Stiff limbs
- o Shivering (note that shivering ceases when the body's temperature drops below 94°F)
- o A body temperature below approximately 101-102.2°F

How to care for dogs with suspected hypothermia:

- o Seek veterinary care as soon as possible, even if the dog appears to be improving. While waiting for a veterinarian:
 - As soon as possible, warm some blankets and wrap the dog in them.
 - Fill a water bottle with very hot water, wrap it in a towel and place it against dog's stomach (an unwrapped bottle may burn the skin).
 - Offer the dog warmed fluids to drink.

Investigation and documentation

Hypothermia, or subnormal body temperature, in otherwise healthy animals typically results from environmental exposure. Debilitated, immobilized and smaller companion animals are extremely susceptible to body heat loss, so it is important to document living conditions and surroundings.

If you suspect exposure-related illness or death:

- o Take the animal's temperature at the time of contact. Document it with written notes and a photograph.
- o Obtain a weather report for the incident date, including the temperature and precipitation.
- o Document any physical signs of hypothermia (see list above).
- o Document the dog's physical and living conditions, including shelter (or lack thereof).
- o Immediately take the dog to a veterinarian for examination.
- o If the dog perishes, pursue a full necropsy by a veterinarian and highlight supportive findings, including organ failure.

In all cases:

- o Obtain statements from witnesses.
- o Obtain veterinary records.
- o Use the totality of the circumstances surrounding the incident to prove that it was weather-related and rule out other causes of suffering.

Recommended tools:

- o Digital thermometer: take the temperature of living or deceased dogs at the time of contact
- o Camera



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