



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Alister F. Martin, MD, MPP
Commissioner

2026 Veterinary Advisory #4

Extreme Heat Increases Risk for Heat-related Illness in Pets

- Extreme heat and high humidity pose life-threatening risks to pets, especially brachycephalic breeds, senior animals, and animals with underlying health conditions.
- Heat-related illness (HRI) includes heat stress, heatstroke, sunburn, and burns to paw pads.
- Signs of HRI in dogs and cats may include excessive panting and drooling, vomiting, weakness, restlessness, and bright red tongue and gums. Signs of burned paw pads can include limping, reluctance to walk, and blisters or redness on the paws.
 - Birds, reptiles, and small mammals may display panting or open-mouthed, rapid breathing, lethargy, weakness, anorexia, and changes in skin coloration.
- Air conditioning offers effective protection for pets and their owners during a heat wave; pet-friendly cooling centers are available in all boroughs and can be found at finder.nyc.gov/coolingcenters.
- To protect pets during the summer, inform pet owners of the health risks that accompany the summer heat. Refer pet owners to [preparedness tips to keep their pets safe during extreme heat](#).

Please share with your colleagues in Veterinary Medicine and your staff.

June 11, 2026

Dear Colleagues,

New York City anticipates upcoming periods of extreme heat during summer months. Extreme heat is increasing in severity and frequency due to [climate change](#), making [NYC summers hotter](#), and causing life-threatening heat-related illness (HRI) in people and pets. High humidity impairs evaporative cooling and can increase HRI risk even when temperatures are not extreme. HRI can also occur during periods of high heat and humidity even after minimal exertion or brief outdoor exposure. Time spent in a hot vehicle is especially dangerous. [A recent Australian study](#) found an association between extreme heat days (>90°F) and increased canine mortality, highlighting the potential health impacts of extreme heat on companion animals.¹

Pets at greater risk of HRI include^{2,3,4}:

- Brachycephalic breeds (e.g., pugs, Persian cats, and breeds with restricted airways)
- Large breed dogs
- Senior animals
- Pets with underlying conditions such as heart, lung, or airway disease, and obesity
- Pets with a long or thick coat

Conditions that may further increase risk for HRI include wearing a muzzle that prevents panting and overexertion or excitement, even on moderately warm days. Cats confined to poorly ventilated apartments can experience HRI, which is particularly relevant in NYC.

Heat Health Concerns for Pets

Heat-related illness presents as a spectrum of disease. In extreme cases the core body temperature may increase to the point at which the animal is unable to thermoregulate. Resulting hyperthermia can lead to organ damage and death. Serious complications for dogs that survive include rhabdomyolysis, acute kidney injury, acute respiratory distress syndrome, disseminated intravascular coagulation, and, potentially, secondary sepsis.³ Hot surfaces can cause thermal burns on paw pads. The surface heat of asphalt, concrete, sand, and metal can be up to 40 to 60 degrees hotter than the air temperature.

Birds, reptiles, and small mammals may display panting or open-mouthed, rapid breathing, lethargy, weakness, and anorexia; reptiles and amphibians may show changes in skin coloration; and birds may hold their wings away from the body.

Educate Clients on How to Protect Pets and When to Consider HRI^{5,6}

Remind clients to:

- Keep pets indoors with air conditioning, when possible, to prevent overheating and dehydration.
- Provide plenty of fresh, clean water.
- Exercise pets early in the morning or late in the evening when temperatures are cooler. Never leave a pet chained outdoors during extreme heat.
- Never leave pets in a parked vehicle. Temperatures can quickly increase, even with the windows open. Call 911 if a pet is seen alone in a hot car.
- Do not fully shave fur off pets. Though fur trimming is acceptable, fur provides protection from both heat and sunburn. Use pet-safe sunscreen if needed on exposed skin.
- Avoid hot ground surfaces like asphalt which can burn paw pads and quickly raise body temperature.
- Ensure consistent cross ventilation for caged animals.

Educate clients to be familiar with early signs of HRI, including:

- Excessive panting or difficulty breathing
- Seeking shade or trying to lie down
- Red tongue and gums
- Drooling, thick saliva
- Increased heart and respiratory rate
- Weakness, stupor, or collapse
- Altered mentation, disorientation, or seizures
- Bloody diarrhea and vomiting
- Signs of burned paw pads, including limping, reluctance to walk, blisters or redness on the paws, licking or chewing at the paws, and vocalizing when pressure is applied to the foot

Cats may exhibit more subtle signs of heat stress than dogs.⁷ Dogs pant for many reasons, but panting cats are concerning and may indicate that they are struggling to breathe.⁸

If overheating occurs:

- Move the pet to a shady and cool area
- Spray cool (not cold) water on the body
- Do not cover with wet towels as this can trap heat
- Seek veterinary care

Pet-Friendly Cool Options in NYC

People without air conditioning are encouraged to visit pet-friendly places with air conditioning such as a NYC cooling center, or a friend or family member's home. Other options including cafés, museums, or libraries are accessible to service animals but may not permit pets.

NYC cooling centers are available throughout the warm season; all cooling centers permit service animals, and 15 centers are pet friendly, with additional locations added during heat emergencies. Visit finder.nyc.gov/coolingcenters to find locations, phone numbers, and hours of operation for cooling centers. In the map view, select "pet friendly" icon in the top panel to find pet friendly locations. Locations can also be found by calling **311**.

Other Seasonal-Related Considerations

Pets should be current on heartworm and parasite prevention. Owners should be aware that mosquitoes and ticks are more active in warmer weather and can transmit diseases to pets and owners and should consider tick prevention products. Pets should avoid swimming in water that is discolored or murky or has floating scum, as this can indicate presence of a harmful algal bloom.

Helpful Resources

- To view prior Veterinary Alerts, visit: [Zoonotic and Vector-borne Provider Publications - NYC Health](#)
- [Alert #15: Protect People at Risk of Heat-Related Death During Extreme Heat](#)
- [Pets & Service Animals - New York City Emergency Management](#)
- [Heat and Pets – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Health Alert Network – NYC Health](#)
- [Hot weather safety tips - ASPCA](#)

As always, we appreciate your continued collaboration with our efforts to monitor public health issues in New York City.

Sincerely,

Asha Abdool, MPH; Maya Hajny Fernandez, MPH; Renee King, MPH; Kevin Lovingood, MPH; Ryan MacDonald, MPH; Marc Paladini, MPH; Christina Ng, MPH; Sally Slavinski, DVM, MPH, DACVPM; Emma Vanhdy

Zoonotic and Vector-borne Disease
Bureau of Communicable Disease
ZIVDU@health.nyc.gov
347-396-2600

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Visit our webpage for information and resources for veterinarians: [Zoonotic and Vector-borne Diseases: Information for Providers](#)

If you do not receive these alerts via email and would like to be added to the distribution list, email zivdu@health.nyc.gov

Report animal diseases to the NYC Health Department:

- Online through a [secure web-based reporting platform](#)
- Call 347-396-2600
- Fax the [Animal Disease Case Report form](#) to 347-396-2753

Report upon suspicion: Anthrax, brucellosis, glanders, influenza (novel with pandemic potential), mpox, plague, Q fever, SARS, tularemia

For rabies, call the Animal Bite Unit at 646-364-1799 to report suspect rabid animals or for assistance with pets exposed to rabies.

Report upon laboratory diagnosis: Arboviral encephalitides, carbapenem-resistant organism (CRO), leptospirosis, psittacosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, salmonellosis, tuberculosis

Report within 24 hours any outbreak or suspected outbreak of any disease, condition, or syndrome, of known or unknown etiology, which may pose a danger to public health.