

Serenity Pet Salon & Spa: Reminds pet owners to prepare for the coldest months of the year

Posted on Tuesday, Jan 11, 2022

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

MADISON, WI – According to U.S. Climate Data, January is the coldest month of the year in and around Dane County. Of course anyone who has lived through a Wisconsin winter is already well aware of how frigid it gets after the holidays. It's often a brutal punishment just to go outside. The wind and cold gets under your skin, into your bones, and causes cruel discomfort even if you're exposed to the elements for only a short while. And if the exposure is that tough on you, just think how it affects your pets that don't have the luxury of proper boots, gloves, hats, coats and scarves.

With few exceptions, dogs need to go outside several times a day to take care of business. Despite the freezing temperatures, they might also still enjoy a walk, getting fresh air, and having a little frolic in the snow. But for the safety of your dog, these activities must be monitored and supervised so they do not succumb to Jack Frost's nip.

"There are certain dog breeds like Huskies, Malamutes and Shiba Inus that have super thick fur to keep them warm in cold temperatures," says Lis Johnston, owner of both Serenity Pet Salon & Spas in Madison. "But most breeds should not be in the cold for long, even if they're wearing a coat."

Johnston says a doggie coat may give pet owners a false sense of security, but coats and sweaters generally cover from neck to the base of the tail. That means that your dog could still get frostbite on his ears, tail, and feet, so keep outdoor time and walks short.

“You’ve heard it before,” says Johnston, “but if it’s too cold for you, it’s too cold for them. Minimize exposure! If you’re ready to call it quits, there’s a good chance your dog’s ready to go inside, too.”

Johnston says the time of day can also affect your dog’s comfortability when it’s cold. She suggests taking walks when there’s sunlight like in the late morning and early afternoon. Take advantage of sunny days by letting your dog play for a while. Playing fetch or just romping around in the snow in the sunshine can help you and your dog soak up a little vitamin D, too.

Walking across ice-melting rock salt can be unpleasant and even excruciating to your dog. Granules of salt can easily get stuck in your pet’s paws, causing discomfort with every single step. If your dog’s paws are already cracked from the dry weather, the agony is much worse. The poor thing is literally having salt rubbed into wounds.

“It’s really important that pet owners help protect their pet’s paw pads in the wintertime,” says Johnston. “Ice, snow, dry air, and especially salt can be very hard on their paws.” She recommends doggie booties, avoiding salty areas, wiping down their pads with warm water and a soft towel when you get home, and using a paw balm or petroleum jelly on the bottom of their feet to prevent cracking. You may also want to have your groomer cut back the fur that grows between your dog’s pads.

Keeping an eye on your dog while he’s outside is important for various reasons. For

one, you do not want him to ingest dangerous chemicals found in ice salt and antifreeze. Try to steer your pet away from areas where either of these can be found, especially driveways. If your dog is in unfamiliar territory, you want to make sure he or she does not wander too close to a snow-covered frozen pond or other water source.

“Winterizing” your dog isn’t all about the outdoors, either. Here are some additional tips Johnston recommends to keep your dog healthy and happy in the winter months:

- Don’t let your dog sleep on a cold floor. Invest in a doggie bed or at least let him cuddle up in some warm blankets.
- To the best of your ability, train your pets to stay a safe distance away from space heaters, radiators, fireplaces and other heat sources.
- Keep your pet’s coat moisturized with coconut oil or other moisturizer recommended by your vet or groomer.
- Don’t over-feed your dog in the winter. Your dog will likely be less active when it’s cold, so avoid giving him extra calories to burn off.
- Make sure your dog always has access to fresh water.
- Keep your dog clean and groomed so his natural insulation is in peak condition. And make sure your dog is completely dry after a bath before letting him outside.
- Be doubly careful about elderly dogs. They need warmth, and their outside time should be kept to the bare minimum.
- And as ever, DO NOT leave your dog unattended in the car! Cold temperatures are dangerous. If you leave your car running, your dog runs the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Just don’t do it.