

## **PET OWNERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS.**

Do to the impending severe cold the Connecticut Department of Agriculture encourages pet owners to take precautions to protect their pets from the cold weather.

**Know the limits.** Just like people, pets' cold tolerance can vary from pet to pet based on their breed, coat, body fat stores, activity level, and health. Be aware of your pet's tolerance for cold weather, and adjust accordingly. Long-haired or thick-coated dogs tend to be more cold-tolerant, but are still at risk in cold weather. Short-haired pets feel the cold faster because they have less protection, and short-legged pets may become cold faster because their bellies and bodies are more likely to come into contact with snow-covered ground. The same goes for very young and very old pets. If you need help determining your pet's temperature limits, consult your veterinarian.

**Stay inside.** Cats and dogs should be kept inside during extreme cold weather. Like people, cats and dogs are susceptible to frostbite and hypothermia and should be kept inside. Longer-haired and thick-coated dog breeds, such as huskies and other dogs bred for colder climates, are more tolerant of cold weather; but no pet should be left outside for long periods of time in below-freezing weather.

**Make some noise.** A warm vehicle engine can be an appealing heat source for outdoor and feral cats. Check underneath your car, bang on the hood, and honk the horn before starting the engine to encourage cats to abandon their roost under the hood.

**Check the paws.** Check your dog's paws frequently for signs of cold-weather injury or damage, such as cracked paw pads or bleeding. During a walk, a sudden lameness may be due to an injury or may be due to ice accumulation between his/her toes. You may be able to reduce the chance of ice ball accumulation by clipping the hair between your dog's toes.

**Prevent poisoning.** Clean up any antifreeze spills quickly, as even small amounts of antifreeze can be deadly. Make sure your pets don't have access to medication bottles, household chemicals, potentially toxic foods such as onions, xylitol (a sugar substitute) and chocolate.

**Provide shelter.** If you are unable to keep your dog inside during cold weather, provide him/her with a warm, solid shelter against wind. Make sure that they have quality food and access to fresh, non-frozen water. Space heaters and heat lamps should be avoided because of the risk of burns or fire. Heated pet mats should also be used with caution because they are still capable of causing burns.

**Recognize problems.** If your pet is whining, shivering, seems anxious, slows down or stops moving, seems weak, or starts looking for warm places to burrow, get them back inside quickly because they are showing signs of hypothermia. Frostbite is harder to detect, and may not be fully recognized until a few days after the damage is done. If you suspect your pet has hypothermia or frostbite, consult your veterinarian immediately.

**Be prepared.** Cold weather also brings the risks of severe winter weather, blizzards and power outages. Prepare a disaster/emergency kit, and include your pet in your plans. Have enough food, water and medicine (including any prescription medications as well as heartworm and flea/tick preventives) on hand to get through at least 5 days.