

Pets in Cold Weather

With darker nights and colder days we at the RSPCA want you and your pets to stay safe and warm this winter. Check out our top tips and find out how you can help.



Walking dogs in winter

Stay safe when walking your dog in the dark, wear reflective clothing and think about a reflective collar or light for your dog's collar.

If you have an elderly or sickly dog, you can buy a special coat or jumper to keep them warm.

Keep your dogs away from ponds and lakes that are iced over. Thin ice may break under a dog's weight. And, if it's snowing outside, watch out for your dogs' paws becoming compacted with snow, which can cause discomfort.

Be aware that antifreeze and rock salt can be poisonous to pets. After walking your dog in areas that may have been gritted with rock salt ensure you wash their paws thoroughly.

Keeping cats warm

In the coldest months it's important that your cat has access to a warm environment, such as your home or another inside area with appropriate heating.



Check your feline friend's bedding is away from cold draughts, and stays warm and dry.



Horses and ponies

Horses and ponies kept outside need to have access to shelter, constant fresh water and some may need a waterproof rug to protect them from cold and wet weather. Provide extra feed and good quality long fibre, as grass is often sparse. Check water troughs and buckets are clear of ice.

If it's wet and muddy, be sure to regularly check hooves, for problems such as abscesses and loose shoes, and legs, for any signs of mud fever. Owners should ensure horses have access to a dry resting area, out of the mud.

When riding in the winter, beware of getting your horse sweated up as they can easily catch a chill. Always wear reflective clothing when riding on the roads.



Rabbits and guinea pigs

Outdoor pets, such as rabbits and guinea pigs, need extra bedding, such as dust-free hay in winter months. Make sure their home is protected from adverse weather by using blankets or covers which can be purchased to help insulate hutches in the

winter months. Care must be taken to ensure there is adequate ventilation.

To protect them from wet weather the indoor area of their enclosure should have a sloped roof to allow water to drain away. Hutches should be raised off the ground by at least four inches, and be placed in a sheltered position, facing away from wind and rain.

If the temperature drops to below 15 degrees centigrade you may want to consider moving their enclosure into an outhouse shed or unused garage. If you decide to bring your rabbits or guinea pigs indoors they'll need plenty of time and room to exercise in a safe and secure environment.

Birds in aviaries, coops, or runs

Protect pet birds kept outside from cold weather by providing plenty of additional dry, warm bedding such as straw and cover enclosures to keep the wind and rain out.

Birds will eat more to keep warm in cold conditions so ensure the birds always have access to plenty of food and fresh water, ensuring water does not freeze over.

Fish ponds in your garden

If you have a fish pond check it every day to make sure the surface is not entirely frozen as poisonous gases can build up under the ice.

Don't break the ice as this can harm the fish, but carefully place a saucepan of hot water on the surface to gently melt a hole in the ice. Never tip boiling water straight onto the pond either, as this can also harm or kill any fish living there.

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