

Most people get a hint that summer is just around the corner when they notice things like the gradual browning of the hills, kids throwing water balloons in the street, and maybe that first urge to fire up the barbeque. Veterinarians on the other hand might use different cues. Those of us in the animal health care field notice things like a dramatic increase in itchy patients, many more fleas on patients, foxtails in nearly every body orifice and the occasional overheated dog, just to name a few. Don't get me wrong, veterinarians enjoy the summer as much as anyone, we just spend a lot of it dealing with some nasty animal health problems. Maybe this year we can deal with a few less. I'll try to help by reviewing some of the more common problems we see and maybe how to prevent them.

1) Foxtails

There's a reason I put foxtails first. Simply stated it's one of the most common problems we see this time of year, but it's also the most preventable. For those of you that are not native Californians or are relative neophytes to the west coast, a foxtail is a seedpod from the native grasses in our area. These wedge shaped little devils can stick to nearly anything and are especially efficient at sticking to pet hair. We've removed foxtails from ears, eyes, noses, toes, abscesses and more. Prevent this problem by limiting your pet's access to open areas with dried grasses and weeds, remove weeds from the yard, and after each walk brush your pet and remove any freeloaders that have taken hold.

2) Heat Stroke

The over-heated pet (usually large dogs) is a serious problem that can develop very rapidly. A pet left in a car, even for a few minutes, on a hot day is the classic scenario. We also see pets that have been exercised too much or housed in a shade-less location on hot days. Sadly, many of these emergency patients don't make it. We've seen body temperatures in the range of 106-108 degrees. If prolonged, this devastating hyperthermia is lethal.

3) Accidental poisoning

Insecticides, mouse and rat bait, herbicides, automobile fluids, and household cleaners are just a few examples of materials that pets have an uncanny ability to find, and strangely enough, eat. We see more poisoning cases in the warmer parts of the year so think about your pet's safety as well as your own when using these products.

4) Fleas, Fleas, Fleas (and maybe ticks)

We see fleas on our area pets year round, but there's no doubt that the summertime is especially challenging. Fortunately, the flea control challenge is nothing like it used to be. With relatively new products available (Advantage® and Frontline®), we've found fleas to be rather easy to control. We recommend not waiting until you see fleas on your pet; it's better to start flea control efforts before the problem develops. And remember, if you're seeing fleas on your pet there are likely hundreds, maybe thousands, more in the environment (home and yard).

Tick control is also rather easy. Our favorite product for tick and flea control is Frontline®. Talk with your veterinarian on how these products are used.

5) Dog attacks

This is the first year I've put this on our list of "common summer problems" but I think I need to. With the warm weather, we all tend to take our dogs out for walks more. Unfortunately, summer is when we see more dog attacks as well. Usually it's just someone walking his or her dog, on a leash, and another dog, usually off leash, rushes up and attacks the innocent bystander dog. Because it seems to occur so randomly, this problem is particularly hard to prevent. Control of this dangerous problem requires better community education as well as a basic understanding of responsible dog ownership. Simply stated, if you own a dog you are responsible for it's control. That means adequate confinement in the home or yard (i.e., secure doors and good fencing). If you take your dog out of your home or yard (or car), with rare exception, you must have him/her on a secure leash. For those of you that already know these rules, when you walk your dog, avoid taking your dog to areas known for loose and/or aggressive dogs, and always be alert for loose dogs.

The long warm days of summer can be a fun time for the entire family-both human and animal. Take a few steps this year to make this season a safe and healthy time as well. With any luck, I'll even have time to get out and enjoy it with you!

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