

# Swimming Safety



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Despite the late start it appears that summer's heat is finally settling in bringing with it countless opportunities for dogs and their people to enjoy the refreshing cool waters of the local rivers and lakes. Here are some recommendations to keep your canine companions safe and injury free while you enjoy the summer sun.

1. Invest in a quality floatation device that is appropriately sized for your dog and be sure to use it! It will do no good left at home or in the car.
2. If your dog has been a weekend warrior over the long winter/spring, gradual introduction to regular physical activity is the best way to prevent injury – in or out of the water. Swimming is a very physically demanding activity, both muscularly and cardiovascularly. If your dog's fitness level does not match the physical demand the risk of injury and fatigue will increase.
3. Monitor for dehydration, fatigue and heat stroke. It may seem implausible that a dog can overheat while swimming but they certainly can if they are relentlessly retrieving over and over again in very hot weather. Dogs don't pant while they swim so the ability to maintain a normal core body temperature may be reduced. The first sign that your dog has reached maximum cooling ability is when the tongue is wide and flattened out in the shape of a spade. When you see this find a cool, shady place to let your dog recover.
4. Look for water hazards such as logs, rocks, sharp objects and strong currents as well as safe entry and exit sites. Parasites and blue-green algae are also potential hazards so it is best to take plenty of clean, fresh drinking water for your dog.
5. Special considerations for seniors:
  - a. Have a physical examination done by your veterinarian before heading out for summertime activities.
  - b. **Always** use a float vest.
  - c. Older dogs do not regulate their body temperature well so constant monitoring is vitally important.
  - d. Confidence in their own physical ability is often diminished so good, gradual footing into the water is recommended. If possible swim with your dog or simply allow them to wade.
  - e. Closely monitor for fatigue, signs of lethargy, excessive, difficult or loud panting.
6. Water safety doesn't end when you head home. Continue to monitor your dog for symptoms such as coughing, diarrhea, vomiting, decreased appetite, pain or lethargy.