

Sunburn in pets

Overview

- Pets can get sunburnt just like people!
- Hairless skin and areas of thin or light-coloured fur are most at risk.
- Sunburn causes skin damage and can lead to certain types of skin cancer.
- Fortunately, it's easy to prevent your pet getting sunburnt by limiting their time in the sun, providing shade and using sunscreen.

General information



Just like us, your pets can get sunburnt if their skin isn't protected. Generally, fur provides excellent protection from sunlight, but if your pet is very short haired, has light coloured fur, areas of thin fur or any hairless areas (ears/nose/tummy), they are at risk of burning. The most common areas for pets to get sunburnt include the:

- Ears
- Nose
- Tip of the tail

- Tummy
- Back

Sunburn is painful, causes skin damage and can lead to skin cancer.

[Skin cancer in cats](#)

Signs

Sunburn in pets looks just like sunburn in humans and causes symptoms such as:

- Redness
- Crusting
- Flaking
- Itching
- Blisters
- Pain

Treatment

If your pet is severely sunburnt, your vet should check them straight away. Treatment will depend on the seriousness of the burns.

If you are unsure how serious your pet's burns are, call your vet practice for advice.

Mild sunburn can often be treated at home.

- **Use cold compresses** to cool the skin but be very gentle when touching your pet's sunburn.
- **Keep your pet out of sunlight** until their skin has healed.
- **Use sunscreen** to protect sunburnt skin if your pet has to go outside. Use a high factor (SPF 30 or higher), waterproof, sunscreen that is pet or child safe. Apply two layers at least 15 minutes before your pet goes outside. Don't allow your pet to lick their sun tan lotion off.
- Alternatively, you can use **sun protective clothing**, such as a highly rated SPF fabric/T-shirt to cover their sunburn.

Prevention

It's easy to prevent sunburn:

Limit sunlight exposure

- Don't allow your pet to sunbathe for long periods of time in direct sunlight.
- Make sure they always have access to plenty of shade.
- Avoid walking your dog in the middle of very hot days, instead, stick to the cooler mornings and evenings.

Apply sunscreen

- Apply sunscreen to any unprotected skin (such as bare skin, and areas of thin or light coloured fur) on sunny days. Dogs often need it on the ends of their nose and tummy, and cats tend to need it on their ears/end of their nose.
- Use a high factor (SPF 30 or higher), waterproof, sunscreen that is pet or child safe. Apply two layers at least 15 minutes before your pet goes outside.
- Don't allow your pet to lick their sun tan lotion off.

Watch our video: How to apply sunscreen to dogs

When to contact your vet

Very mild sunburn (slightly red skin), usually heals within a few days with treatment at home. However, if your pet has severe sunburn, or appears to be in pain, they will need to be seen by your vet straight away.

You know your pet best, always contact your vet if you are concerned.

Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?

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