







Heat-Related Illness (HRI) also known as **heatstroke**, is a serious, **life-threatening** condition in dogs.

It can happen:

-  During or after **exercise**
-  In **hot weather** or warm environments

The longer a dog's body stays overheated, the higher the risk of severe disease or even death.

Fast and effective cooling can:

-  **Minimise** damage
-  **Speed up** recovery
-  **Save** lives

Using data from VetCompass – including Vets Now clinical cases – two studies examined how pet owners and vet practices respond to dogs with heat-related illness. Here are the key findings every dog owner should know:



Cold-water immersion was the **most effective** cooling method for dogs in the study.

No damaging effects were seen from cold-water immersion. **Cold water is better**, but use water at whatever temperature is most rapidly available, providing it is **cooler than the dog**.

Two cooling methods are recommended

Evaporative cooling

Spray or pour water on the dog and create **air movement** over them by using fans or air conditioning. This can be used on **all dogs**, including **older, unconscious, or unwell** dogs.



Immersion in water

Recommended for **healthy, conscious** dogs. Cold is better, but use whatever is most rapidly available, provided it is cooler than the dog.



Vets Now clinical records were reviewed for over 800 dogs treated for heat-related illness during 2022–2023:

Only 28% were cooled prior to transportation for veterinary care, of which just 40% were cooled using water.

Delaying cooling and/or using ineffective cooling methods can substantially reduce the dog's chance of survival.

COOL FIRST, TRANSPORT SECOND

How to cool dogs safely and effectively

The cooling methods used on dogs at canine sports (Canicross) events were investigated.

Placing a dog in a vehicle SLOWED cooling post-exercise. The longer a dog's temperature remains high, the more damage is likely.

If transporting a hot dog for veterinary treatment in a vehicle:



Begin cooling your dog before they get into the car.



Make sure the vehicle is **cooled down ahead of time.**



Maintain **good airflow** around your dog during the journey – use **air conditioning** or **open windows.**

Take home MESSAGES

1

Wet before vet

2

Cool using water

- **Seek veterinary advice immediately** if your dog develops signs of heatstroke, such as excessive panting, reluctance to move and collapse.
- Previous advice to 'cool slowly' and only use 'lukewarm or tepid' water is a **myth.**
- **Don't delay – rapid cooling saves lives.**
- **Prevention is better than cure – if in doubt don't go out in hot weather!**

To read the original studies click the links below:

[Post-exercise management of exertional hyperthermia in dogs participating in dog sport \(canicross\) events in the UK](#)

[Bird, L., Hall, E. J., Bradbury, J., Beard, S., Carter, A. J., Gilbert, S., Barfield, D., & O'Neill, D. G. \(2025\). Hot dogs - do owners follow the "wet then vet" cool-rule for dogs with heat-related illness? BSAVA Congress Proceedings 2025, 2025.](#)