

## Winter Animal Health Tips

By Beth Crandall

As we are experiencing below freezing temperatures, we should make sure that our livestock and companion animals are prepared. Here are some tips from the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

### Livestock

Livestock are typically tolerant of winter temperatures, though there are a few things that owners should consider to make them more comfortable and efficient. Animals should be going into the winter months healthy, in good weight, and prepared to deal with cold, wind, and snow. Old, young, or sick stock often require special attention during colder times.

The three major things that should be considered for winter livestock care are:

1. Animals should have a way to get out of wind, rain, and snow, as these require a greater expenditure of calories. If horses are blanketed, they should have the area under their blanket checked frequently for sores and to ensure it is dry.
2. Livestock can create their own heat through the consumption of calories. It is important that livestock receive a slight increase in feed proportions and quality during the colder months. Their body condition score should be evaluated frequently throughout the winter and feed adjusted accordingly.
3. Access to unfrozen, fresh water is critical during the winter months. Livestock will drink less water if it is frozen and when they have to break through ice on their own.

### Companion animals

Companion animals such as dogs and cats are less tolerant of colder temperatures. Just like humans, they are more susceptible to hypothermia and frostbite than livestock. They should go into the winter months healthy and prepared to deal with winter conditions.

Animals that are particularly sensitive to colder temperatures include those that:

- Are old or young
- Have arthritis, Cushing's, heart diseases, or diabetes
- Have shorter, thinner coats

Pets should not be kept outside in below freezing temperatures for long periods of time. If they are outside over the winter, they should be provided with warm shelter and fresh, unfrozen water. Their shelter should provide protection against wind, water, and snow. Bedding should be thick and dry, providing insulation from the cold.

When taking animals on walks, make sure to avoid large bodies of water where they could fall through the ice. Keep them away from areas where they could get into antifreeze or other poisonous substances. Keep walks short, be sure to check your dog's paws for ice chunks between their toes and signs of frostbite.

The best way to care for your animal in the winter is to avoid cold-related issues by providing them with proper shelter, food, and water.