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NEAR DROWNING IN PETS



Swimming season has arrived in the GTA and with it so too has another hazard of summer; the risk of drowning.

The VEC emergency service occasionally sees sad cases of distraught owners rushing in with drowned or near-drowned pets in their arms. Usually these are dogs that have fallen into the pool, and despite being able to swim, quickly panic, tire and drown when they cannot pull and claw their way out of the pool. Occasionally they are dogs or cats who have fallen through thin ice, or into rivers or lakes.

We suggest that veterinarians remind their clients about the hazards pools present to their furry little friends. Fortunately, increasing awareness and a few safety tips will help to keep these pets safe.

By law all pools should be completely enclosed and gated in order to keep children and pets away from danger. Owners may consider installing a pool-specific dog ramp to provide an escape route for animals that become trapped in the pool. There are also alarm systems available that attach to a pet's collar which will sound when the animal gets into water. Teaching the family dog(s) how to find the stairs in the pool, so they will know how to get out if they accidentally fall in, can also be an effective preventative measure.



As well owners should note that pool covers present a significant danger, as pets may walk across the cover, fall through and then become trapped underneath.

Dogs with a history of seizures are especially at risk, and should never be left alone with access to the water.

Aspiration of fresh water causes inactivation of surfactant, which results in atelectasis, ventilation-perfusion mismatch, and hypoxia. Inhalation of only small amounts of water may cause severe broncho and laryngospasm. Attempts to breathe against closed airways may result in pulmonary edema. Prolonged hypoxemia causes multi-organ failure, cardiac arrhythmias, and central nervous system injury.



Pets that present for near drowning require oxygen supplementation, supportive intravenous fluid therapy, and treatment for hypothermia, if it is present. Mechanical ventilation may be necessary if oxygen supplementation alone is insufficient to obtain adequate oxygen levels, or if the animal is working hard to maintain normal oxygen levels. Corticosteroid therapy has not shown to be helpful, and may worsen outcome. Antibiotics also are not helpful unless there is some concern that stomach contents may have been aspirated during the incident. Close monitoring for evidence of organ damage is necessary in the

first few days after the near-drowning. Access to round the clock care is often necessary to treat these critically ill patients.

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