



VACATION BOUND

Emily Fisher, CPDT-KA Scratch and Sniff Canine Services, Guelph, ON

We love to bring our dogs everywhere, and summer vacations are no exception. Whether going camping, renting a cottage, or visiting family, taking certain precautions will keep our canine companions happy, healthy, and safe.

Most of us will travel by car to our summer destination. Recent testing has shown that dog seatbelts are not a significant protection against injury. If possible, have your dog in a properly sized crate inside the car. If your dog gets nauseous, speak to your vet about anti-nausea medications prior to your trip. Ensure good ventilation and offer your dog cool, clean water at all rest stops.

Secure your dog on a leash prior to allowing her out of the crate or car. Running loose near a road or at a rest stop poses significant risks to both your dog and others. The driver's lap or the back of a truck is no place for a dog. If your dog is not crated, the back seat is the safest place for her. Open windows and loose dogs are a terribly unsafe combination. Injuries from flying debris are common, and your dog might actually jump or fall out – I know a shepherd who jumped out an impossibly small car window!

A car heats up to an intolerable degree in only a few minutes, even with the windows open. Take your dog out of the car at rest stops or leave the car on with the A/C running if you'll only be a minute – but be sure to keep all food

and garbage out of reach. You might want to cut an extra car key in order to lock the doors while the car is on.

Heat can also be a problem outside of the car. Large dogs and “squishy-faced” breeds, such as bulldogs, pugs, and many breeds of mastiff, in particular suffer in the hot weather. Several years ago my neighbour's American Bulldog died of heatstroke after a short early morning run. Watch for breathing difficulties, bright red mucous membranes, vomiting, uncoordinated movements, weakness, and seizures. Bring your dog to a vet immediately if you see these signs. Prevent heatstroke by encouraging your dog to remain inactive and in a cool place; provide air conditioning for large, “squishy-faced,” elderly, or sick animals; always have cool, clean water available; and allow access to swimming or other water if your dog enjoys getting wet. But please do not force a dog to swim if he doesn't enjoy it!

Brush up on your pet first aid and map out vet clinics where you'll be travelling. Take note of their hours of operation during holidays and look specifically for 24-hour emergency clinics. You'll be glad to have this information in case of emergency! My own dog once gouged her cornea when I was camping with her. Luckily, I knew where the nearest open vet clinic was – almost two hours away! Additionally, review your dog's ID tags and microchip information to be sure it is all up to date. Affix a temporary waterproof tag with your local contact information during travel.

Boat safety is important too! Purchase a dog life jacket and ensure that it is sized and fitted correctly. Even if she is a strong swimmer, your dog will need the extra buoyancy in an emergency. One person in the boat should commit to supervising the dog to prevent her jumping out of the boat. However, some dogs just aren't made for boat travel. If

she is scared of the boat, please respect your dog and do not force her in. Be extra cautious when fishing with dogs. Many dogs bite at flies and may jump for the lure during a cast or swim out to a bobber thinking someone threw a ball for them. No one wants to pull a barbed hook out of a dog!

Mouse poison is a frequently overlooked cottage hazard. If renting, speak to the owner or rental agency to ensure that poison isn't laid and hasn't been used recently. Mice and rats may drop pieces around the cottage even if lockboxes hold the stash. If you must use poison in the off-season at your own cottage, draw a map of all bait locations and place them only in inaccessible spots – such as the far corner under a bed, under the cottage, or in the pump room. Before allowing your dog to step foot in the cottage, thoroughly clean all the floors with a focus around the bait spots. Store any leftover poison in a tightly closed container on a high shelf. Rodent poison is deadly to dogs, and it's also formulated to be delicious. Inducing vomiting at home is not sufficient to prevent poisoning; you must get your dog to a vet immediately.

Finally, ask yourself if your dog is going to enjoy the vacation. Is your extended family vacationing together but your dog is nervous of strangers? Is Cousin Alice bringing her brood of six children, but your dog is intolerant of kids? Does the next cottage over have three dogs who run loose, but your dog is reactive with other dogs? Boarding might be a kinder option in situations like those. Don't put your dog in a situation you know will scare or upset him. Not only is it unpleasant for your dog, it potentially puts him or others at risk.

Taking necessary precautions and planning your dog-friendly vacation carefully may sound like extra work, but ultimately you will thank yourself!