SUNBURN

What is it? Damage or burns to the skin caused by the sun’s radiation.

What animals are affected? Most pets are protected from sunburn by their fur and pigmented skin. Areas of skin that have been shaved are more prone to burning. Dogs and cats with sparse fur and light colored skin are more susceptible to sun related injury. Parts of the body with minimal fur coverage such as the ears, nose, and abdomen are more prone to sun damage.

What are the signs? Sunburn can appear as red skin or hair loss. Sun exposure may worsen preexisting skin conditions such as allergies, hot spots, and immune mediated skin disease.

How is it diagnosed? Sunburn is diagnosed based in history consistent with sun exposure and the associated skin lesions.

How is it treated? Prevention is better than treatment. If sunburn occurs, an Aloe Vera product may be applied to the affected skin. If skin lesions are serious or extensive, examination by a veterinarian is advised.

What after care is needed? Monitor for skin lesions or unusual moles. Seek veterinary care for further evaluation as needed.

What is the prognosis? Sun related burns generally will resolve, but continue to monitor for any unusual skin lesions or growths. Dogs and cats can develop skin cancer.

Can it be prevented? Avoid direct sun exposure during the peak hours of 10am-4pm. Make sure your pet has access to shade. Sunscreen can and should be used on dogs and cats. Sunscreen can be applied to areas with poor fur coverage – tips of ears, bridge of nose, skin around the lips, and any other location with low pigment. Human sunscreen products such as baby sunscreen may be used. If your pet may lick off the sunscreen, choose a product specifically formulated for pets to limit the chance for toxicity. Use liberal amounts of sunscreen, at least one tablespoon of lotion for each body area treated. Reapply sunscreen every 4-6 hours as needed.