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HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
NEWS RELEASE



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**Kent County Animal Shelter Releases Cold Weather Pet Tips**  
*Owners Urged to Protect Pets from Dangerously Cold Temperatures*

**GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (December 9, 2021)** – The Kent County Animal Shelter (KCAS) released an updated [video](#) about the special care your pet needs during the cold weather. While Michigan law<sup>1</sup> does not prohibit dogs from being left outside in the cold, state law requires that all dogs who spend time outside have access to adequate shelter, fresh water, and dry bedding. The statute also stipulates separate shelter requirements for livestock.

“The best place for our pets is in our home next to us, but we know that is not always possible. We encourage all pet owners to take appropriate steps to protect those animals that may be left outside for long stretches of time,” said Angela Hollinshead, Kent County Animal Shelter Division Director. “Many pets are not equipped to handle the effects of cold temperatures, so we want to remind pet owners of their responsibilities to care for them during the winter.”

A few of the cold weather requirements in State statute include:

1. Maintain adequate shelter, which can be one or more of the following:
  - a. Inside the owners’ home.
  - b. An enclosure or shelter with at least three sides and a roof that is appropriate for the size and breed of the dog. A structure, including a garage, barn or shed, that is sufficiently insulated and ventilated to protect the dog from exposure to extreme temperatures, or if not sufficiently insulated and ventilated, contains a doghouse inside the structure.
  - c. Structures or natural features such as trees or topography for livestock.

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<sup>1</sup> [Michigan Public Act 452 of 2018](#), [Michigan Public Act 652 of 2018](#)

KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit [www.accesskent.com/health](http://www.accesskent.com/health).

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2. Provide dry bedding, such as straw, when the temperature is or predicated to be below freezing. Avoid using blankets or cloth bedding as these materials will likely get wet and freeze.
3. Provide water that is safe to drink and suitable for the age and species of the animal. Owners are encouraged to check every few hours to ensure the water is not frozen.

Although Michigan law does not directly address free-roaming or community cats, the KCAS encourages residents be mindful of their needs as well. Cats are typically well adapted for living in colder climates, but they greatly benefit from having access to a shelter. Simple cat shelters made from a storage tote lined with foam and stuffed with straw make great places for cats to escape from the cold. An instructional video for creating your own cat shelter is available on the KCAS [website](#).

“Michigan winters are certainly beautiful but can be dangerous for some animals if they do not have appropriate resources. We encourage pet owners to watch our educational video and learn about these dangers, so your pets are safe and happy this winter,” concluded Hollinshead. “If you cannot keep your pet indoors and need resources, we urge residents to reach out to the KCAS to so see how we can help.”

The KCAS is also prepared to investigate all reports of animal neglect throughout the winter. Residents are encouraged to call the KCAS at (616) 632-7300 if they notice an animal being kept outside for an extended period without adequate shelter, water, and bedding.

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