WHEN DOES AN OUTDOOR CAT NEED HELP?

RECOGNIZING ILLNESS, INJURY & WINTER EMERGENCIES

CAC COMMUNITY EDUCATION • PET PARENT SERIES

WARNING SIGNS: WHEN TO BE CONCERNED

- Behavior: Unusual hiding, weakness, lethargy, or inactivity.
- Appetite: Refusing food, difficulty eating, or weight loss.
- Illness: Eye/nasal discharge, coughing, sneezing, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Injuries: Limping, wounds, swelling, bleeding, or difficulty walking.
- Body Condition: Matted fur, significant weight loss, or poor grooming.

WINTER EMERGENCIES



HYPOTHERMIA — Dangerously Low Body Temperature

- Extreme weakness, lethargy, or collapse.
- Cold body, slow breathing, or reduced responsiveness.
- Shivering may stop as hypothermia worsens.

FROSTBITE — Freezing Injury to Tissue

- Commonly affects ears, paws, and tail.
- Skin may appear pale, gray, bluish, swollen, or painful.
- Tissue damage may not be immediately visible.

Suspected hypothermia or frostbite requires immediate veterinary attention.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

1. OBSERVE: Note changes in behavior, appetite, or appearance.
2. CONTACT: Call a veterinarian, rescue, or TNR organization.
3. CONTAIN SAFELY: Use a humane trap or carrier with experienced assistance.
4. SEEK CARE: Arrange prompt veterinary evaluation.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

- Not every outdoor cat needs to be removed from its environment.
- A healthy, ear-tipped cat may already belong to a managed colony.
- Never give human medications without veterinary direction.
- If dangerously cold, move the cat somewhere warm and dry if safe. Warm gradually while seeking emergency care; avoid direct heat or rubbing frostbitten areas.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

- Alley Cat Allies. Community Cat Care. alleycat.org
- American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). Cold Weather Animal Safety. avma.org
- VCA Animal Hospitals. Hypothermia in Cats. vcahospitals.com

Educational disclaimer: General educational information only. This handout does not diagnose, treat, or prescribe for any animal and does not replace examination or individualized advice from a licensed veterinarian. Identification, licensing, collar, and travel requirements may vary by location and circumstance. CAC Community Education: General pet-parent education only. Not a substitute for individualized advice from a licensed veterinarian.