

It doesn't have to be 100 to be dangerous for dogs

Canines with shorter snouts more susceptible to heat stroke

By Chris Vongsarath, STAFF WRITER

Article Last Updated: 08/08/2007 02:39:26 AM PDT

DANVILLE — On a sunny, reasonably warm Saturday afternoon, Logan Boersma and his dog, Buddy, were playing at the Canine Corral at Hap Magee Ranch Park in Danville when Buddy started to show signs of fatigue.

A worried Logan, 11, called his father, who rushed over to the dog park.

Ed Boersma found Buddy, a 4-year-old English bulldog, with a blackened tongue panting uncontrollably under the shade of a tree. He put Buddy in the car and stopped by two Alamo vets, only to be turned away by their weekend hours. A suggestion from his dog washer directed him to Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center, where — about 25 minutes after Buddy started panting heavily — she received care and was released later that day.

"I didn't think I was coming home with a dog that day," Ed Boersma said. "When we stopped at a stop light, she was breathing so hard that the car was shaking. I've never seen anything like that before."

Boersma is one of several dog owners in recent weeks to bring his dog into Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center with heat stroke and exhaustion. And while it has not been an overly hot summer in the Tri-Valley this year, the string of occurrences may be attributed to a combination of factors and a lack of awareness.

Boersma said he had some knowledge about how susceptible English bulldogs are to heat stroke, but was surprised to see Buddy succumb to heat stroke on a day that was only mildly warm.

"The breeder cautioned me about the hot days, but I anticipated that to be 100-degree days," Boersma said.

The problem, says Dr. William Love at Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center, lies in a combination of factors.

Depending on the breed, a dog that is in fairly good shape can succumb to heat stroke on a mildly warm day if other factors, such as humidity and hydration, are compromised.

This is because of how dogs cool themselves. Covered in fur and unable to sweat, dogs can only cool down by evaporating water from the inside of their noses and mouths. In other words, they pant.

Accordingly, dogs with shorter noses and mouths — English bulldogs and pugs, for example — are more susceptible to heat stroke and more care should be taken when exercising in hot weather.

Love, who treated Buddy, said the best treatment may be prevention. Since obesity is another risk factor, dog owners should be aware of how physically fit their dogs are and pay attention to the day's conditions.

Besides exercise, another common danger is leaving dogs in a car while the owner runs errands. While parents know they shouldn't leave a child in a car, some people forget the same advice when it comes to leaving a dog in a car, where temperatures can rise up to 45 degrees higher than the outside temperature.

"Humans are able to exercise common sense, and we have to make sure we're looking out for our canine friends in the same way," Love said.

Dr. Liesl Peterson said the recent occurrences are not uncommon and Bishop Ranch Veterinary sees them on a yearly basis. Peterson, who treated a dog that died from heat stroke a couple weeks ago, said the reasons dogs come in are numerous.

"Owners are just not aware of how overheated dogs can become," Peterson said. "The important message is that this can be fatal for dogs."