

Winter Paw Care: Protecting Your Dog's Paws From Cold Pavement & De-Icing Salt

Simple, practical steps to prevent tenderness, cracking, chemical burns, and cold injury during winter walks.

Winter walks are great for mental and physical health—but winter conditions can be rough on paws. Cold pavement pulls heat from the pads, snow and ice can pack between toes, and de-icing salt/chemicals can sting, dry out, or burn the skin. A few small habits (and the right gear) can make a big difference.



Healthy Paw



Salt Irritation



Frostbite Risk

Figure 1 (illustration): Healthy paw pads vs. salt irritation vs. frostbite risk signs.

1) Cold pavement and ice: why paws can become tender

Paw pads are tough, but they can still become sore when they're exposed to very cold surfaces for long periods. Ice and frozen ground can also dry pads out, leading to cracking—especially in dogs who already have sensitive feet.

Watch for:

- Limping, stopping suddenly, or refusing to walk
- Lifting a paw repeatedly
- Excessive licking or chewing at the feet after a walk

Frostbite is less common than mild irritation, but it can happen in freezing temperatures—especially when paws are wet, windy conditions lower the ‘feels-like’ temperature, or outdoor time is prolonged.

2) De-icing salt and ice melt: why it can burn pads

Road salt and ice-melt products can be caustic. They can irritate the skin on the pads and between the toes, and salt crystals can be abrasive—causing tiny cuts that sting and may get infected. If a dog licks the residue off, it can also irritate the mouth and upset the stomach.

3) Boots and booties: the best winter paw protection

Boots (booties) are the best option for many dogs because they create a physical barrier between the paw and the cold, ice, and salt.

Good booties should:

- Fit snugly (not tight) and stay on during a walk
- Have a grippy sole for icy sidewalks
- Be easy to clean and dry

Tip: Practice indoors first—short sessions with treats—so your dog learns that booties are normal.

4) Paw balms and pad protectants: use the right kind

If your dog won't tolerate boots, a paw wax or pet-safe balm can add a protective layer. Choose products made for pets, and read labels carefully. Avoid human lotions and anything with strong fragrance or alcohol, which can be drying or irritating. In very cold weather, also avoid leaving paws wet—apply sparingly and allow time for the product to absorb before heading outside.

5) After-walk routine: 60 seconds that prevents problems

When you come inside:

- Wipe or rinse paws with lukewarm water to remove salt/chemicals
- Dry thoroughly, especially between toes
- Check for redness, cracking, or clumps of ice stuck in fur

If your dog has long hair between the pads, keeping it neatly trimmed helps reduce snowballs and trapped salt.

Quick Winter Paw Checklist

- Booties on for salted sidewalks
- Shorter walks during extreme cold or wind
- Rinse + dry paws after every walk
- Trim hair between pads to prevent snowballs
- Call your vet if you see swelling, bleeding, blisters, or persistent limping

6) When to call your veterinarian

Contact your veterinarian if you notice any of the following after a walk: swelling, open sores, bleeding, blisters, dark or pale discoloration of the skin, or limping that doesn't settle quickly.

How Pampered Paws Ltd can help

At Pampered Paws Ltd, we can tidy the hair around and between paw pads, keep nails at a safe length for winter footing, and help you choose a paw-protection plan that fits your pet's comfort level. Ask us about a quick 'paw check' add-on during your visit.

References (for further reading)

- American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA): Cold weather animal safety
- VCA Hospitals: Four strategies for cold weather paw protection
- Ontario SPCA: Winter care for your dog's paws and skin