

# Storm Phobia

By Dr. Hannah Bigelow, DVM

Monsoon season has arrived! Unfortunately, storm phobia is a common cause of anxiety in pets. 90% of dogs with storm phobia are fearful of loud noises, such as thunder. Other anxiety triggers include changes in barometric pressure or humidity, rain, lightning, wind, etc. Some dogs are more prone to storm phobias than others. Herding and hunting dogs are said to be genetically predisposed to storm phobia. Female dogs are more likely to exhibit signs of storm anxiety than male dogs. Common clinical signs of storm phobia include: shaking, pacing, hiding, inappropriate urination/defecation, salivation, panting, vocalizing, destructive behavior, seeking human contact, attempting escape, etc. If not handled appropriately, animals with storm phobia (or any anxiety disorder) have the potential to harm themselves or you. Remember that animals react to their surroundings; they can pick up on human anxiety, which perpetuates their negative behavior.

Behavioral issues are not always straightforward. Once your dog is showing significant signs of anxiety, oral medications are unlikely to resolve the undesirable behavior. Most behavioral problems cannot be fixed with medication alone and multimodal treatment is warranted. The best way to prevent storm phobia is to avoid triggers. Creating a safe place for your pet within the home can significantly improve anxiety. Using noise muting cage coverings and room darkening shades will decrease negative stimuli. Thundershirt body wraps, Mutt Muffs ear coverings, and Doggles eye covers are available to help alleviate storm phobia triggers. Melatonin, Dog-appeasing pheromone (Adaptil), and behavior supplements can be administered for their calming effects. Training done outside of storm season can help desensitize and/or counter-condition your pet to common causes of storm phobia. Anxiolytic medications used in conjunction with training and other calming treatment strategies can decrease anxiety significantly.

Behavioral issues come in many different forms. 90% of dogs with separation anxiety have some other anxiety disorder, most common of which is storm phobia. In a recent study, 50% of people said their dogs were fearful of loud noises. Only 1/3 of these people sought professional advice regarding noise phobia. If your dog suffers from storm phobia or any other anxiety disorder talk to your veterinarian about possible training and treatment options to improve their life and yours. We can accommodate natural remedies as well as using pharmaceuticals, depending on your preference and the severity of your dog's anxiety or fear of storms.

