

## **Holiday and Seasonal Hazards**

As the holiday season approaches, life, for your dogs and other pets, can get pretty hazardous. Activity increases, great smelling, wonderful food abounds; trees and plants are brought into the house; power cords and interesting lights are everywhere; all kinds of interesting packages are delivered, some full of candies and other goodies; and owners are busy and not paying particular attention to what is being investigated and/or eaten by the pets. Remember that, in most cases, the severity of the problem caused by these products will depend on the amount ingested and the size and age of the dog. When in doubt, call your veterinarian or POISON CONTROL CENTER (see below) for further information.

### **Aluminum Foil and Plastic Wrap**

Aluminum foil if ingested, can cut a dog's intestines, causing internal bleeding, and in some cases, even death. Plastic food wrap can cause choking or intestinal obstruction. Some dogs will eat the plastic wrapping when there are food remnants left coating its surface

### **Anti-Freeze**

If ingested, anti-freeze (ethylene glycol) is often lethal -- even in very small quantities can cause acute kidney failure. Because of its sweet taste, many dogs and cats like it as well other small mammals, horses, birds, reptiles and livestock, and there are always a number of animal fatalities each year caused from animals drinking anti-freeze. Poisoning from anti-freeze is considered a serious medical emergency which must be treated by a qualified veterinarian IMMEDIATELY. One company, the Sierra Company now offers a far less toxic form of anti-freeze. They can be reached at (888)88-SIERRA for information. Symptoms can include: Vomiting, drunken appearance, excessive drinking and urinating, seizures and kidney failure. Note: There is an antidote for ethylene glycol toxicity (dogs only) but to be maximally effective it must be given within a few hours of ingestion. You can read more about *Antizole*, an antidote for ethylene glycol toxicity courtesy of the drug's manufacturer. Unfortunately, for those dogs already in kidney failure, the antidote is ineffective; and a prolonged hospital stay will be required for recovery.

### **Bloat**

Eating quickly, changes in diet, and gas-producing foods may all contribute to this serious condition. Bloat (gastric torsion & stomach distension) is a serious life-threatening emergency which must be treated by a qualified veterinarian IMMEDIATELY. Bloat is relatively common among large and deep-chested breeds, such as Basset Hounds, Dobermans, German Shepherds and Great Danes. Many experts believe that a feeding a large meal within 2 hours of

exercise or severe stress may trigger this emergency. Symptoms of Bloat include: unsuccessful retching, pacing, panting, drooling, an enlarged stomach/torso, and/or signs of distress.

### **Bones**

Cooked bones from steak, veal, pork, turkey or chicken, as well as ribs, can be hazardous to your dog and are not recommended. Raw bones, if your dog is not accustomed to having them can also cause gastric problems and diarrhea.

### **Electrocution**

Christmas tree lights and electrical cords can be fatal if chewed on by a dog (or cat). Whenever possible, keep electrical cords out of reach.

### **Fireworks**

Firecrackers and firework displays can cause fear issues and long term phobias. Because these displays are common and part of life, be aware of your dog's response to them. Make sure that no one ever throws a piece of firework at or near your dog. Some dogs may actually go after the sparks and be seriously injured. Make sure to keep dogs indoors, as many animals are lost on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and New Years due to running when fearful and they lose their way home. Try masking loud firecracker noises with "white noise", as well as with music or other familiar sounds like a radio or television. I have also found that using Rescue Remedy or Calming Essence helps in a lot of situations.

### **Hypothermia**

Any sign that a dog is very cold -- such as shivering -- should signal the owner to bring the dog indoors immediately. When a dog's internal temperature drops below 96 degrees F (by being exposed to cold weather for long periods, or getting both wet and cold), there is a serious risk to the dog's safety. Also be aware of ice or snow on the dog's pads. Be sure to dry them carefully when returning indoors. Dogs can get frostbite on both their ears and their toes.

### **Ice-Melting Chemicals and Salt**

Ice-melting chemicals and salt used on sidewalks and roads can cause severe burning to your dog's footpads. Try to avoid walking your dog through these substances, and be sure to wash off his footpads when you return home. There are also products available such as Musher's Secret which is applied to your dog's footpads prior to going outside. Products such as this may help reduce the pain that is often caused by road salt and chemicals. These chemicals may also cause vomiting, diarrhea, disorientation and electrolyte imbalances.

## Tinsel and Other Christmas tree Ornaments

Tinsel may cause obstruction of the intestines when swallowed by your pets, and the tinsel's sharp edges can even cut the intestines. Symptoms may include: decreased appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, listlessness and weight loss. Treatment usually requires surgery. Most ornament dangers are foreign body hazards rather than true toxicities. The small metal ornament hooks can also cause serious problems and be quite dangerous if swallowed.

**EXCEPTION: The NAPCC has reported ornaments made from homemade play dough can contain high levels of salt and have had several cases where dogs ingesting homemade play dough have died of salt poisoning.**

## Food Related Toxins

During the holiday season, we prepare beautiful meals and we want to share with our pets. Feeding your pet's rich, fatty table scraps that they are not used to can lead to severe intestinal problems and abdominal upset. Fatty foods are a common cause of pancreatitis, a very painful disorder that can afflict both dogs and cats. It can be very dangerous to give your dog a meaty turkey bone to chew after you are through with your meal. Small pieces of the bone may splinter off and perforate an intestine, or cause intestinal blockage. If you want to prepare your dog a special holiday meal, serve him his regular food with a small amount of cooked meat or canned food added, and add a small amount of other doggy treats as a topping.

Here are some other foods to be aware of:

**Acorns** when given to dogs, horses and cattle can cause gastrointestinal upset, foreign body obstruction, and kidney failure.

**Alcohol** if given to your pets may produce the symptoms of drunken appearance, vomiting, lethargy, respiratory depression: **serious intoxications have occurred when dogs have been given alcohol to drink as a "joke". Also, dogs seem to be attracted to alcoholic drinks, so drinks should not be left unattended**

**Avocados** fed to dogs, cats, rabbits, goats, cattle, horses and birds may cause vomiting, diarrhea, inflammation of the mammary glands in some species, heart and respiratory problems in some species

## Chocolate

During many holidays such as Christmas, New Year's Day, Easter and Halloween, chocolate is often accessible to curious dogs, and in some cases, people unwittingly poison their dogs by offering them chocolate as a treat.

[Chocolate](#) contains an element which is toxic to dogs, called Theobromine. Even an ounce or two of chocolate can be lethal to a small dog (10 lbs. or less). Larger quantities of chocolate can poison or even kill a medium or large dog. Dark chocolate, cocoa, unsweetened baking chocolates, and chocolate chips are especially dangerous but even milk chocolate can be deadly in large enough amounts. Symptoms of chocolate poisoning include: vomiting, diarrhea, tremors, hyperactivity, seizures, fast hear rate, rapid breathing, life-threatening heart arrhythmias and coma. The high amounts of fat in most chocolate items can precipitate a bout of pancreatitis in susceptible animals. Be sure not to leave any sort of chocolate out where your pet has access to it. This can be a very dangerous situation because your dog or cat may have ingested a toxic amount of chocolate while you were gone; however, you will not know it until he starts showing signs of toxicity. If you see your pet eating chocolate, note of the type and amount and call your veterinarian right away.

**Coffee and caffeine** is a no-no for dogs, as it acts as a stimulant and can cause severe heart acceleration. When fed to dogs cats and small mammals caffeine may cause vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity, tremors and seizures

**Corn Cobs** Many dogs have suffered and, in some cases, died after eating corn-on-the-cob, when the corn cob caused partial or complete intestinal obstruction. Never allow your dog access to corn cobs.

**Raw yeast dough** - yeast from homemade bread produces alcohol - ingestion of raw yeast dough can result in serious alcohol intoxication. Additionally, here is a risk of bloat and gastrointestinal obstruction from the dough as it rises in the stomach. It can also cause respiratory depression and cardiac arrest.

**Macadamia Nuts** can cause increased body temperature, muscle stiffness, increases heart rate, tremors, weakness, vomiting, and in-coordination

**Raisins and Grapes** may cause Vomiting, diarrhea, anorexia, lethargy and kidney failure.

**Other miscellaneous dangers:**

**Batteries** will cause foreign body obstruction and corrosive injury to the mouth and gastrointestinal tract.

**Human Cough/Cold/Flu medicines** when ingested by cats, dogs, small mammals and reptiles may affect one or more body system, life threatening conditions possible

**Christmas gifts:** perfumes and after-shaves generally contain fairly high levels of alcohol, which can be dangerous to dogs.

**Candles:** Most people like to burn candles during the holiday season, do not leave burning candles unattended. Candles can be fascinating to pets, cats especially. Candles can singe and burn their whiskers or face if they get too close to the flame. If the burning candle should get knocked over by a tail wag or a playful paw it can lead to a real disaster. Be sure to keep burning candles out of harm's way and never leave a burning candle unattended.

### **Human Intended drugs**

Over-the-counter and prescription drugs intended for humans should not be used in dogs or cats except upon the advice of that pet's veterinarian. Some drugs that humans use routinely are highly toxic in pets. One example is "acetaminophen" (Tylenol), which is highly toxic in cats. The drug damages feline hemoglobin rendering it incapable of carrying oxygen.

### **Poisonous Plants**

Dogs (and cats) can become extremely ill or even die from eating poisonous plants. Keep all unknown types of plants and any plants suspected of being poisonous out of reach of your pet, and/or spray with Bitter Apple (for plants). See the list below for some of these plants.

**American holly (*Ilex opaca*)** when ingested by cats, dogs, small mammals and reptiles may cause gastrointestinal upset and depression, severe vomiting and diarrhea.

**Christmas cactus and Amaryllis** when ingested by cats, dogs, small mammals and reptiles may cause gastrointestinal upset, severe depression, abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhea.

**Christmas trees (firs, cedars, pines)** contain volatile oils that can cause vomiting and diarrhea; needles can cause irritation to the mouth and stomach. The needles of the tree (both real and artificial) are also dangerous because they are indigestible. This can lead to abdominal upset and again potential intestinal blockage

**Christmas tree preservative** contain sugar and fertilizer-the sugar will attract the dog and the fertilizer can cause vomiting when ingested by cats, dogs, small mammals and reptiles may cause mild gastrointestinal upset.

### **Mistletoe**

**(depending on the variety)** when ingested by cats, dogs, small mammals and reptiles may cause gastrointestinal upset (vomiting & diarrhea), lowered blood pressure, cardiovascular collapse, difficulty breathing, seizures or coma, and other variable signs.

**Poinsettia** The rumors of its toxicity have been somewhat exaggerated. It can cause vomiting and diarrhea, but rarely causes severe problems.

Other plants can be located on the links listed below. Please take the time to look them up; you may be surprised at what you will find.

**This list is not inclusive of all the harmful and toxic dangers out there but it should hopefully allow you to be aware of what is happening to your pet during the holidays and in the event of an accident it will help you to identify the dangers and encourage you to have a contact number to poison control handy. Your dog may be the best dog ever and will never get into things, but all dogs will be playful or inquisitive at some time or another so it never hurts to be prepared. One of the most common comments heard from pet owners as they call for advice on poisonings is "but he's never bothered that before!"**

**[ASPCA Animal Poison Control](#)**

**888-4ANI-HELP      888-426-4435**

The following internet sites have information on poisonous plants.

**[Medicinal and Poisonous Plant Databases](#)**

<http://www.calacademy.org/research/library/biodiv/biblio/poison.htm>

**[Poisonous Plant Database](#)**

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~djw/plantox.html>

**[Toxic Plants and Foods](#) courtesy of Dr. Bob**

<http://www.sonic.net/~petdoc/Poison1.htm>

Be sure you have the telephone numbers for your veterinarian, emergency clinic, and local poison control center readily available.

There is a list of **[Poison Control Centers](#)**

<http://www.sonic.net/~petdoc/poison.html> (available on the Web.

The ASPCA's **[National Animal Poison Control Center](#)**

[http://www.asPCA.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pro\\_apcc&JServSessionIdr011=1prt0n6uu1.app27b](http://www.asPCA.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pro_apcc&JServSessionIdr011=1prt0n6uu1.app27b) (also has a web site that includes their 800 number for emergency cases.)

And you can always call 911 and ask to be put thru to poison control.