

# Protect Your Pet From Household Toxins

By Ryan Gershenson, DVM

WWW.VECC24.com



All too many pet owners have experienced the moment of panic that accompanies discovering their pet has eaten something and not knowing if the substance is toxic. The old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is especially true when it comes to toxins. Education is key to knowing what in or around your home may be harmful for your pet. Once you know those things that are potentially harmful you can take the steps necessary to keep it away from your pet or eliminate it from your home altogether. If your pet has gotten into something potentially toxic and is showing signs (symptoms), you should seek veterinary care immediately. If your pet has just gotten into something you know is toxic you should take him or her to the vet right away as your vet may be able to take measures to prevent or decrease the severity of the problems the toxin can cause. If you are unsure if something your pet has consumed is indeed toxic you can call your local veterinarian or call the leading veterinary authority in toxicology, the ASPCA Poison Control Center. They answered 167,000 phone calls in 2010 about pets potentially exposed to toxic substances. According to the ASPCA poison control website the ten most common pet toxins are:

## 1. HUMAN MEDICATIONS:

It is important to remember that dogs and cats are not little people and many drugs used to treat humans are toxic to pets or toxic if given at the same doses as those given to people. This is not only true for prescription medications, but is especially true of over the counter medications.

Aspirin, Tylenol and ibuprofen are all toxic at the usual human doses and at even very small doses, especially in cats. Pets consume human medications most commonly by getting into pill bottles or picking up pills that were dropped by their owners. Occasionally owners administer medication to their pets without consulting a veterinarian, a mistake that can unfortunately be fatal. All human medications, both prescription and over the counter, should be kept in a safe location away from pets, dropped pills should be found and discarded and medication should never be administered to a pet without consulting a veterinarian.

## 2. INSECTICIDES:

Animals can encounter insecticides that are sprayed around the house or administered to the pet for flea and tick control. Pet owners should always ensure that exterminators are using products safe for pets and comply with instructions, such as allowing certain products to dry before

allowing pets to contact them. If you are unsure if a product is safe for pets it should not be used in or around your home. There are many products used to protect dogs and cats from fleas and ticks. Not all of these products are safe and you should always consult with a veterinarian before using a product, especially if this product is not obtained from a veterinary hospital. The most frequent problem with flea and tick preventatives occur when products that are supposed to be used only on dogs are used on cats. Cats are very sensitive to certain products and placing a dog product on a cat can result in serious toxicity or even death. Toxicity can also be seen if products that are only to be used on dogs are used on a dog that lives in the same house as a cat. Close contact and grooming behavior can result in toxicity, even when the product was not placed directly on the cat.

## 3. RODENTICIDES:

Rodenticides are poisons used to kill rodents that are considered to be pests. There are several different types of rodenticides that work by causing abnormal bleeding, seizures and coma, kidney failure and others. Commonly pets are exposed

when they are taken to new environments or in situations where owners attempt to put the products in places where pets do not have access to them. The

best way to make sure that your pet does not become poisoned by rodenticides is to not use them in or around your home and to keep pets on a leash when taking them to unfamiliar places where you are not absolutely sure they are free of hazardous materials.

## 4. PEOPLE FOODS:

While veterinarians commonly advise pet owners not to feed their pets human food for reasons associated with weight, nutrition or GI upset, some human foods are toxic to dogs and cats. Many people are unaware of what foods are toxic to dogs and cats.

Grapes and raisins cause kidney failure in dogs, onions and garlic impair red blood function and even destroy the red blood cells, and xylitol, an artificial sweetener, causes pets blood sugar to drop to an unsafe level and causes liver failure (commonly found in chewing gum and other products). These foods or products with these foods as ingredients should never be given to your pet. The best rule of thumb is to never feed your dog or cat any food you are not 100% sure is safe.

## 5. VETERINARY MEDICATIONS:

Pets may consume large amounts of their medications, especially flavored medications. Pets may also be given too much of their medication by their owner due to accidental double dosing or the thought that giving more medication may be beneficial. It is very important

to take the same care to keep veterinary medications in a safe place away from pets and to never increase your pet's medication without consulting your veterinarian.

## 6. CHOCOLATE:

The main toxic component of chocolate is methylxanthines, which cause stimulation, vomiting, diarrhea and agitation at lower doses and increased heart rate, seizures, coma and even death at higher doses. It is best to keep pets away from chocolate and never to feed products containing chocolate to pets.

## 7. HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS:

Cleaning products and other household chemicals can have a variety of effects, including severe irritation and ulceration in the mouth, esophagus and GI tract. Pets should be kept away from these products.

## 8. PLANTS:

Both house plants and plants used in landscaping can be toxic to your pets. Many house plants and plants in flower arrangements are toxic to pets, especially cats, and there is no rule or regulation that requires stores or florists to inform you if you are purchasing a toxic plant.

All parts of lily plants are toxic to cats (not dogs) and cause kidney failure that is often fatal. Cat owners should never have lily plants in their homes or in any flower arrangement. In Las Vegas the two most common plants that cause toxicity in dogs are the sago palm and oleander. All parts of the sago palm are toxic, especially the bulb or fruit. Dogs who consume sago palms experience severe liver failure that is often fatal. Oleander is another plant that is commonly used in landscaping in Las Vegas. Consuming the leaves of this plant cause problems with the heart that can be fatal. Pets should be kept away from these plants and they should never be planted in a yard where pets frequent.

## 9. HERBICIDES:

Herbicides can be toxic to dogs and cats. Pets should be kept away from these products and only products safe for pets should be used in areas where pets frequent. Be sure to follow the instructions on the package and never use a product that you do not know is pet safe. Removing

unwanted plants by hand may be more labor intensive, but is not toxic to your pets.

## 10. OUTDOOR TOXINS:

Many products used outdoors or in the garage are toxic to pets. One of the more common toxins encountered by pets is antifreeze. Antifreeze has a sweet taste and rapidly causes kidney failure in dogs and cats.

The best way to keep your pet safe is to be educated, eliminate toxic substances from your home and keep toxins safely secured away from pets. If your pet has contacted or eaten something toxic or potentially toxic it is important to seek immediate veterinary attention and contact animal poison control. Contacting Animal Poison Control is the best way to find out if a substance is toxic or if the amount of a substance your pet has consumed could harm them. The veterinary toxicologists at the ASPCA animal poison control can also help your veterinarian in making decisions about decreasing the risk or problems or treating your pet's condition. Three numbers every pet should have are the number for your local veterinarian, the number of your local emergency hospital and the number for Animal Poison Control (888) 426-4435.

