

Top 10 Poisoning Risks

- Human Medications
- Insecticides
- People Food
- Rodenticides
- Veterinary Medications
- Plants
- Chemical Hazards
- Household Cleaners
- Heavy Metals
- Fertilizers



1. Human Medications

Pets can grab pill vials from counters and nightstands or may gobble up any medications dropped on the floor, so it is essential to keep all of your medications tucked safely away in medicine cabinets or hard to reach areas. If there is someone in your household that tends to drop medications frequently, make sure that they take them in a room where the pet is not allowed access.

If anyone in your household is using marijuana for medical reasons it is important to realize that pets should not be in the room when that substance is used. Any illicit or illegal drug is generally highly toxic to pets. Most human medications will be toxic for pets. Never give a human medication to your pet without consulting a veterinarian first.

We will frequently see animals that are accidentally poisoned by well meaning owners who try to administer painkillers such as Tylenol or Advil, cold medications containing decongestants and vitamin supplements. Just because a medication is sold over the counter does not mean it is safe for your pets. Just one extra strength Tylenol can be deadly to a cat and just four regular strength Advil can cause serious kidney problems for a small dog.

2. Insecticides

A common poisoning stems from the misuse of flea and tick products. If you are using a topical flea and tick product it is important that you understand what species, what size animal, and what age animal it is safe to use on. If you are not sure please check with your veterinarian before using the product.

Remember that animals will often eat anything they find that seems tasty. Slug bait left in the garden is a serious risk to companion animals. If you have your house treated for any sort of pest, make sure you know what is being used, what the restrictions are for contact with the substance and what sort of hazard it may pose to your pets. Mothballs contain naphthalene and can be quite toxic.

3. People Food

People foods like grapes, raisins, avocados, macadamia nuts, onions, garlic, alcoholic beverages, coffee and chocolate can all be quite toxic to our pets. Chocolate ingestion is one of the most common problems we see. Depending on the variety, chocolate contains high amounts of fat and caffeine like substances called methylxanthines which, if ingested in significant amounts, can cause vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity, abnormal heart rhythms, seizures and even coma and death. The darker the chocolate, the greater the risk, but we frequently see small dogs ingesting enough milk chocolate to cause problems.

Items that contain the sweetener xylitol are also toxic to dogs. This can be found in chewing gums, hard candies, gum drops, baked goods and even toothpaste. Ingestion of these products can cause a sudden drop in blood sugar, resulting in depression, loss of coordination and seizures, and potentially liver failure. Another serious concern is yeast dough. If an animal ingests uncooked yeast dough they may develop alcohol poisoning from the fermentation process that occurs. You should avoid feeding your pet very fatty or very spicy foods as they can sometimes lead to stomach and intestinal upsets.

The parts of food that we discard can also create problems. It is very common for us to have to do intestinal surgery to remove corn cobs and peach pits. Allowing access to bones may also cause many potential problems. You should always be careful disposing of nonedible items associated with food. Because these items smell like food, animals may swallow them and that can lead to problems, sometimes problems serious enough to require surgery to correct. Items that frequently cause issues are deli-style toothpicks, wooden skewers used to cook meat, packaging materials from meat, and strings used to tie roasts or poultry while cooking.

Although it's not a food, tobacco is a very common product used by us. This can cause serious poisoning problems in your pets do not allow them exposure to cigarette butts, discarded chewing tobacco or other such products.

4. Rodenticides

The same substances that make rat and mice baits attractive to rodents make them attractive to your pets. Depending on the type of rodenticide, ingestions can lead to potentially life threatening problems for pets including bleeding, seizures and kidney damage. Some of these problems may not be evident for 2-3 days and at that point it may be too late to save them.

If you know your pet has ingested one of these substances, please do not wait to see clinical signs take them to your veterinarian or to us at Animal Emergency for evaluation.

5. Veterinary Medications

Although these are perfectly safe when used properly, serious problems can occur when pet medications are used improperly or if an accidental overdose occurs. Always make sure you are giving the right medication, at the right dose, at the right time, to the right pet and keep their medications out of their reach at all times.



6. Plants

Many common houseplants can be quite toxic to our pets. Lilies of all types are especially toxic to cats, and can cause life threatening kidney failure even in small amounts. All parts of the lily flowers and leaves appear to be toxic if eaten so make sure that you exclude them from any floral bouquets you display in your home.

Other types of toxic plants include Sago Palm, Tulip/Daffodil bulbs, Azaleas and Rododendrons, Oleander, Castor Bean, Cyclamen, Kalanchoe, Yew, Amaryllis, Autumn Crocus, Chrysanthemums, English Ivy, Peace Lily (*Spathiphyllum*), Pothos, and Schefflera, just to name a few. If you are thinking of adding some house plants to your home check to make sure that you are not adding a poisoning hazard for your pets.

You also should be careful with plant products. Cocoa mulch contains the same toxic principles as chocolate and should never be used where animals may have access to it.

7. Chemical Hazards

Products such as ethylene glycol antifreeze, paint thinner, kerosene, drain cleaners, ice melting products and pool/spa chemicals are a substantial danger for pets. Always keep your dogs out of the garage or keep all potentially dangerous substances well out of their reach.

Be aware that certain wood glues (like Gorilla Glue) when ingested will expand and can cause life threatening stomach obstructions in dogs.

8. Household Cleaners

It is common knowledge that cleaning products can be very hazardous to children but often people do not consider the potential toxicity of these items for their pets. Common agents such as bleach, detergents and disinfectants can create serious problems for our furry friends.

Cats should never be exposed to cleaning substances like Pinesol, they are particularly sensitive to the substances contained in it and it can be quite toxic for them.

9. Heavy Metals

These are substances like lead, zinc and mercury. Lead is a particularly serious problem and is frequently found in the paint and flooring in old homes and in the paint used on old boats. In addition, decorative stained glass items and even the foil from wine bottles may contain significant quantities of lead.

Pennies that were minted after 1982 contain mostly zinc. When ingested they tend to sit in an animal's stomach and slowly dissolve from the stomach acids. The zinc that is released causes very serious toxic conditions. Sometimes the screws from pet carriers are also made of zinc and some topical ointments, like zinc oxide, contain large quantities of zinc.

10. Fertilizer

Green lawns are great but make sure you are not exposing your pets to danger. Keep all garden products out of your pets reach and realize that you may need to restrict their activity in certain grassy areas for a period of time after the product is applied.

Additional Health Concerns to Consider

1. Pools and Lakes

Children are not the only ones who can drown when left unattended in pools or lakes. Never leave your pet alone when he or she is swimming and always make sure there is an easy way out of the water. Make sure your pool is enclosed and inaccessible to your pet so that he or she cannot go in unattended.

2. Fishing Tackle

Colorful stinky fishing lures are very tempting to cats, dogs and birds and can prove to be very dangerous. Hooks are usually barbed and cannot be backed out until the barb is removed. Never try to remove these hooks on your own. Seek veterinary help and sedation to prevent tissue trauma.

3. Pickup Trucks

Children Dogs love to feel the wind in their faces but an uncovered truck bed is a very dangerous place for your pet. Sudden stops or turns can throw your pet from the truck and a major injury could occur from the fall or by being hit by an oncoming car. Additionally, there is a lot of debris and insects moving at high velocities that can cause eye injuries. It is best if your pet is secured inside your truck.

4. Windows

Whether you live in a private home or an apartment, you'll be tempted to open windows to let in the fresh air. Be sure to keep screens or protective bars on your windows to prevent your pets from escapes or falls. Bird owners should make sure their feathered friends are protected from drafts. Never consider taking your bird outside if it is not in a cage. Even if you are convinced that your bird will not fly away, there are hawks and other large birds that might consider your bird a tasty snack.

5. Household Objects

Things like superballs, small toys, needles with thread attached, towels, underwear and socks can cause serious problems when eaten. Sometimes the only solution is surgical removal. Don't leave things lying around especially if your dog is a puppy or has a history of eating foreign objects.

6. Cars

Never leave ANY pet unattended in your car. While it is never good to leave a pet in a car unattended, summer can be particularly deadly. Don't lull yourself into a false sense of security by leaving windows partially open. When the outside temperature is 79 degrees Fahrenheit, and your window is down two inches, the temperature inside your car can reach 109 degrees Fahrenheit in minutes. It doesn't take long for heat to rise and for your pet to die from heat stroke.

7. Heat Stroke

This is very serious and you should always seek medical care. It does not always take much on a warm day for a dog or cat to experience heat stroke and clinical signs may include lethargy, heavy panting, inability to move and bright red gums. If your pet experiences a heat related issue, cover him or her with a cool wet towel and transport to your veterinarian immediately.

8. Bite Wounds

Spring and summer are the times when dog parks are full of dogs. Most dogs are harmless but when faced with certain conditions a dog could suddenly bite.

- Stay close to your pet.
- Introduce your dog to other dogs and watch their responses.
- If all is friendly, then it is safe to let them play.
- If any type of aggression is shown, take your dog to another part of the park and find a new playmate.
- Do not try to break up a fight by getting in the middle. Use a spray bottle of water, a squirt gun or hose to separate the dogs.
- If your pet receives a bite wound, seek medical help to prevent infection.



9. Holiday Treats & Decorations

can pose hazards to your pet. Alcoholic beverages, candy, turkey, fixings, uncooked yeast dough, and fatty foods can be dangerous to your pet's health. It's important to keep your pet on its regular diet during the holidays as the rich foods that are available can lead to serious illness. Tinsel, glass ornaments, spray on snow, ribbons, wrapping, or anything a pet can swallow are obviously dangerous. Try to hide electric cords and never let your pet chew on them. Do not tie ribbons around your pet's neck or limbs.