

According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC), 31% of all reported pet poisonings are from exposure to "pesticides". This broad group would include insecticides, rat/mouse baits, herbicides, and fungicides. 26% of the pet related calls are about pets getting into prescription or over-the-counter drugs. Household products (cleaning products, cosmetics, paints, batteries, etc) account for 13% of the exposures, with automotive products, arts and crafts supplies, street drugs, fertilizers, and miscellaneous chemicals rounding out the field.

All of those things sound pretty nasty and most pet owners would be aptly concerned if their pet got into them. What may not generate so much concern, but probably should, are some lesser known toxins or poisons lurking in our homes that put our pets at risk. Let's take a look at a few of these maybe unexpected pet toxins one might find around the house.

1) Chocolate. Most dog owners are aware of this potential toxin, but considering it's the holiday season, I thought it was worth noting. Chocolate has caffeine-like chemicals that are particularly difficult for the canine system to remove. Ingestion of significant amounts of chocolate can cause vomiting and diarrhea, agitation, muscle tremors, seizures, and sometimes even death. The "darker" the chocolate the greater the danger. Bear in mind that ingested cocoa bean garden mulch can have the same effect. If your dog has eaten chocolate contact your veterinarian immediately. If possible, try to ascertain the type and amount of chocolate eaten. This will help your vet know if your dog may be in trouble.

2) Macadamia nuts. While the toxic principle behind macadamia nut toxicity is not understood. Dogs eating as little as a 1/2 nut per pound body weight can show, among other things, weakness, mental depression, vomiting, tremors. Joint and muscle pain have been reported as well. Signs usually develop within 6-24 hours of ingestion. Usually the signs are short lived and resolve within 48 hours. Nonetheless, you should contact your veterinarian for advice if your dog gets into macadamia nuts.

3) Grapes/raisins. In some dogs, but not all, grapes and raisins can be toxic. This is a relatively "new" toxin in dogs first recognized in the mid 1990's. While the exact toxic chemicals have not been identified, the end result can be severe irreversible kidney damage. The toxic dose is not known with certainty; remember not all dogs get sick from grape/raisin ingestion. Needless to say, don't feed your dog grapes or raisins-in case he is one of the unlucky sensitive ones.

4) Wild mushrooms. Most folks know to not eat wild mushrooms, but the family dog may not be so informed. This time of year mushrooms seem to emerge overnight in my yard. Very severe liver damage can result if a pet eats one of the toxic varieties. Unless you're an expert at mushroom identification assume all are potentially toxic and dispose of them carefully before your dog can get to them.

5) Xylitol. A common sweetener in sugar-free products like sugar-free gum, xylitol causes a marked drop in blood sugar in dogs. Low blood sugar will cause mental depression, weakness,

collapse and even seizures. Some reports suggest that xylitol may cause liver failure in some dogs as well .

6) Paint balls. All you paint ball enthusiasts out there need to be sure your arsenal is secure. Those brightly colored balls can be toxic if your dog eats them. No one knows how many a dog needs to eat to cause problems, but symptoms can start within 60 minutes of ingestion. Reported signs initially include vomiting, diarrhea, tremors, weakness but can progress blindness and seizures.

7) Gorilla glue. A brand of woodworking adhesive known for its foaming and expansion when curing has proven to be another bad thing for the family dog to eat. Estimates suggest a possible eight times expansion of product in the stomach within two hours. Instead of a chemical/toxic effect, ingested Gorilla glue expands to form a large foreign body in the stomach resulting in gastrointestinal obstruction. Surgery is needed to remove the product from the stomach.

A few other potential toxins that the family pet should avoid: mistletoe, poinsettias, glow jewelry, moth balls, Homemade play dough and, for you home brewers, hops.

For most of us our pets are cherished members of the family. It doesn't take long for them to become an integral part of our lives and daily routines. Surely this is a win-win for both pet and pet lover. Unfortunately, this close relationship also puts our pets at risk for inadvertent ingestion or exposure to potentially dangerous household products and items. I know, as if you need something else to worry about in the days ahead, but maybe devote a little time and effort to assure this holiday season is a happy and safe for the whole family.

*Dr. John Huebner is a 1985 graduate of the School of Veterinary Medicine at UC Davis. Dr Huebner practices companion animal medicine at Redwood Veterinary Hospital in Vallejo, CA. You can send your comments or pet health questions to Dr. Huebner at 731 Admiral Callaghan Lane Vallejo, Ca 94591, or e-mail him at RdWdVet@yahoo.com.*