

Pets and Poisons



Thousands of animals are accidentally poisoned every year. **How would you know and what would you do:**

...if your pet got into some of your medicine...or chewed on the leaves of a poisonous plant...or drank something harmful found in your garage, garden or home?

Although most of the phone calls to the Florida Poison Information Center Network concern human poison exposures, many calls are about pets exposed to potential poisons or harmful substances. Just like people, pets can be protected to prevent accidental poisonings.

Your home and your pet's world can be safe and healthy. Look closely at the places your pet goes. With a systematic approach, take time to safeguard against poisonings by keeping products that could be harmful WELL OUT OF REACH...

In the house:

- **Medication:** Never give your pet "human" medication unless instructed to by your veterinarian. Any medicine-even one tablet-could cause problems, whether prescription or over-the counter. Aspirin, aspirin substitutes, and acetaminophen can be fatal. Keep all medicines in secure, high places, and properly dispose of old medications.
- **Cleaning products:** Some cleaning products can cause vomiting or burn a pet's mouth. Because animals may sample any liquid if they are thirsty, remember to move or empty the mop bucket.
- **Household plants:** Many household plants are toxic to dogs and cats. Know the names of the plants found inside and outside, a nursery or garden center can assist identifying a particular plant. Plants are usually identified on printed tags with care instructions. Save these tags for future reference.
- **Chocolate:** Never give chocolate to dogs or cats. It can cause vomiting, seizures and even death. Be particularly careful around holidays like Halloween, Valentine's, Christmas, and Easter, when candy is sure to be plentiful.
- **Grapes and Raisins:** Large amounts have been known to cause kidney failure and death in dogs.
- **Nicotine/Tobacco:** Cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco and patches or gum used to help curb smoking urges can cause severe symptoms --- including seizures and sometimes death --- if eaten by pets. Keep ashtrays, "spit cups" and all things containing even a trace of tobacco out of a pet's path.
- **Mothballs:** One mothball is enough to be potentially toxic. Do not put mothballs anywhere that pets can get to them, including the yard.
- **Alkaline batteries:** Batteries contain acid which can burn and irritate your pet's mouth and stomach if eaten. They could become lodged in the throat or swallowed. Discard old batteries promptly, where they cannot be found by pets.

In the garage:

- **Antifreeze and windshield fluid:** Automotive fluids, if swallowed, can be potentially life threatening.
- **Petroleum products:** A liquid like mineral spirits and gasoline spilled or leaked on the garage floor, can burn a pet's skin. Some chemicals can be absorbed through the skin, especially if it is broken or irritated.
- **Paint:** Lead based paint, sometimes found in old buildings and homes, can cause lead poisoning if a pet eats enough all at once or over a long period of time.

In the garden:

- **Pesticides:** Products such as mole and cricket powders, chinch bug products and weed killer, for example, should be used as directed. Keep pets out of the treated areas until the product dries completely. If the product is in pellet or bait form, do not use in areas pets are likely to be. Never leave insecticide bags on the ground because it is easy for pets to tear open and eat the contents.
- **Plants:** Many plants cause toxicity when ingested, but lilies are known to be highly toxic to cats. Sticks, leaves and pine cones can cause choking or blockage to a pet's stomach or intestines. Acorns contain tannic acid and can produce severe vomiting and diarrhea. Wild mushrooms are difficult to identify and should always be considered extremely toxic. Some mushrooms can cause liver and kidney damage.

And don't forget...pet products:

- **Flea powders:** Shampoos, heartworm medications, or other pet products should be used according to directions. Some of these are only for older animals and may not be safe for puppies or kitten. Many times your pet may lick his coat or skin after a pet medication or flea product has been applied. If you have any questions about a product's safety, consult your veterinarian before using it.
- Some **pet toys** may not be suitable for all pets. Rawhide pieces can swell and cause choking. Cow hoofs can splinter and puncture the stomach or intestines. Supervise your pet when introducing a new toy. Make sure it is sturdy enough to withstand chewing.

What to do if your pet is poisoned...



1. Keep the number of the poison information center handy, 1-800-222-1222.
2. Skilled specialists can often assist in pet poisonings or refer you to an animal poison center if necessary.
3. Find out if your veterinarian has emergency hours. If not, locate the closest animal emergency clinic. Many poisonings occur at night or on the holidays when your regular vet may not be available.
4. Keep a bottle of hydrogen peroxide, 3% solution available at all times. Hydrogen peroxide is used to induce vomiting... but **DO NOT** induce vomiting unless instructed to do so by your veterinarian or a professional at the Poison Center. In some cases this attempt can cause more harm than good, making the poison accident more serious.

Animals do not always know when something is “bad” for them. It is up to us to provide a safe environment for them.

Florida Poison Information Center Network

Serving Florida's Residents and Health Care Professionals

Accredited as Regional Poison Control Centers by the American Association of Poison Control Centers. The Network is a cooperative effort between the three poison centers and their affiliated medical and academic institutions, including Shands Jacksonville/University of Florida Health Science Center; Jackson Health Systems/University of Miami Miller School of Medicine; Tampa General Hospital and the University of South Florida College of Medicine. The Poison Center Network is funded by the Children's Medical Services, Florida Department of Health.

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