



Holiday Safety Tips

The holiday season is often the most joyous time of the year. However, joy can turn to tragedy if simple precautions are not taken to ensure the safety of your pets.

“Pets are curious by nature,” said Dr. Steve Hansen, a board-certified veterinary toxicologist and senior vice president of The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). Hansen, whose department also includes the ASPCA’s Animal Poison Control Center, asks pet parents to be mindful of their pets this holiday season.

“Thinking about your home from your pet’s point of view will help ensure everyone has happy and safe holidays,” Hansen said. “Pets have the ability to get into everything, especially during the holidays when there is more to see and do.”

Simple holiday traditions, such as trimming the tree and decorating the house, can pose potential problems to pets if not monitored carefully. In addition, some holiday decorations such as poinsettias and mistletoe can be toxic if an animal eats them.

Dr. Leon Robbins, doctor of veterinary medicine at Grandview Animal Hospital near Winston-Salem, NC, warned that much like toddlers, pets are attracted to bright lights, shining ornaments and dangling tinsel.

“Many holiday decorations are hazardous to pets,” said Robbins. “Try to use big, pet-friendly ornaments and keep the ornaments, as well as the lights, out of a pet’s reach.”

The most common pet-related emergency that occurs over the holidays is the consumption of human pharmaceuticals. Dr. Hansen said that many people keep their medications in daily pill minders, their luggage or even leave it lying out when staying with family or friends.

“All prescription and non-prescription drugs should be safely stored,” Hansen said. “Even in small doses, human medications can be potentially lethal to pets.”

Food is the culprit for the second most common holiday pet emergency. According to Dr. Robbins, pets should be kept on a normal diet, as it will alleviate digestive problems.

“If there is food left over, don’t give it to your pet as a holiday treat,” said Robbins. “Instead give baby carrots, green beans or broccoli as treats.”

To ensure a happy and safe holiday season for you and your pets, Critter Sitters Extraordinaire, LLC, recommends that pet owners be cautious of the following:

Dark and baker's chocolate. While milk chocolate is not poisonous, it will cause your pet to have an upset stomach. On the other hand, dark chocolate and baker's chocolate contain high levels of theobromine and caffeine. Animals are extremely sensitive to both and ingesting either type of chocolate could be fatal.

Xylitol. This sugar substitute causes a dog's blood sugar to drop quickly. This poisoning can be treated, but causes liver failure if not treated properly.

Macadamia nuts. Dogs experience severe weakness in their back legs, appearing paralyzed, after ingesting macadamia nuts. Dogs usually recover from this condition within three days.

Avocados. Avocados pose a serious threat to birds. Avocados cause respiratory distress in birds, causing fluid to build up in their lungs.

Bread Dough. When bread dough is ingested it continues to rise, causing an intestinal blockage.

For information on additional human foods that can be toxic to animals, see our article "Toxic Love: Dangerous Foods for our Animal Companions".

If your pet ingests any potentially harmful product, call your vet or a local emergency animal hospital immediately or call the ASPCA's [National Animal Poison Control Center](#) at (888) 426-4435 (charges may apply).

Critter Sitters Extraordinaire, LLC offers pet owners these helpful hints to keep pets out of danger, while still enjoying the food, fun and festivities that accompany the holidays. We hope that your holidays are safe and filled with joy!



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