



Veterinary Connections



*News about Animal Health, Food Safety, and One Health.
Army Public Health Center*

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SPECIAL HOLIDAY EDITION

Pet Proofing for the Holidays



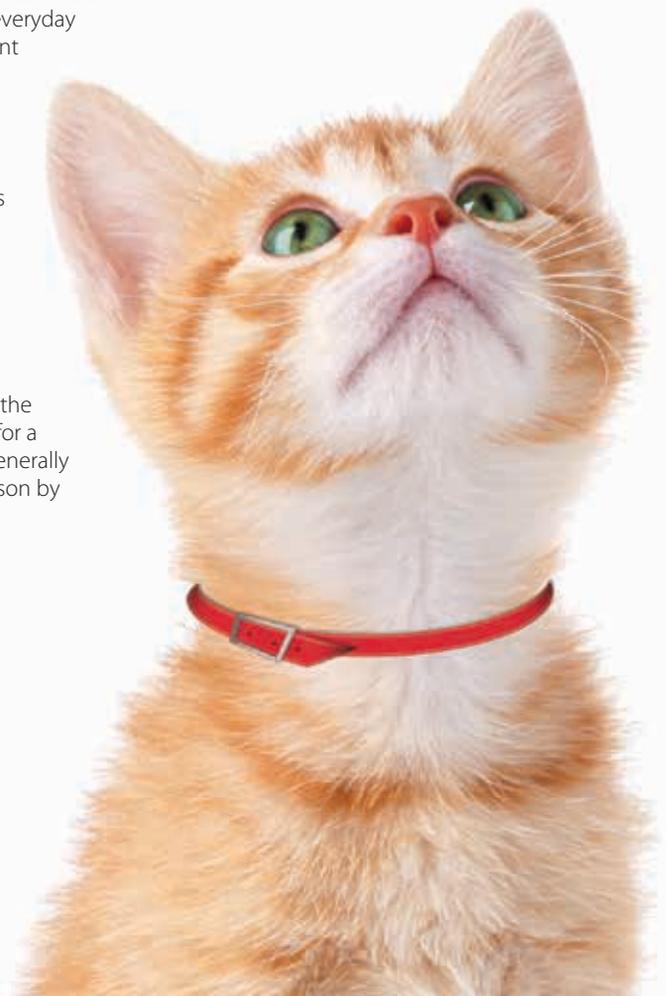
The holiday season is fast approaching. Soon, freshly baked cookies will fill houses with their sweet aroma, doors will showcase stunning wreaths, and towering trees adorned with strings of holiday lights and shiny ornaments will provide a holiday centerpiece. While decorating homes in the spirit of the holidays, it is important to remember that everyday decorations can be hazardous to your pet. Recognizing these dangers can prevent emergency veterinary visits and additional stress this holiday season.

One staple of holiday decorating is string. Twine, ribbon, and tinsel are used to decorate presents and hang ornaments. Did you know cats will often mistake string for a toy? String that is eaten can be caught in the small intestine and create an obstruction. String in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract causes the intestines to bunch like an accordion and may require surgical treatment. Prevent this hazard by not allowing your pets to play with string, tinsel, ribbon, or bows.

Our feline friends are not the only culprits guilty of eating foreign objects. Puppies are infamous for mistaking holiday tree decorations for chew toys. Bright, shiny, low-hanging ornaments reflect light and are mesmerizing to pets. Ornaments can quickly be reduced to shards of glass or plastic if the tree is left unattended. If swallowed, glass and sharp plastic pieces can cause lacerations in the mouth and GI tract. Plush decorations within reach on the tree can be mistaken for a novel chew toy and quickly eaten by your dog. Foreign bodies in the stomach generally require removal by endoscopy or surgery. Prevent these hazards this holiday season by ensuring decorations on the tree are out of reach of your furry family members.

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Pet Proofing for the Holidays

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Twinkling clear and multi-colored holiday lights are commonly used to brighten trees and front porches. However, lights provide a risk of shock when pets bite on the electrical cord. Electrical burns can occur on your pet's tongue and in their mouth. Fluid buildup in the lungs can also occur as a result of electrical shock. Shock can cause difficulty breathing, abnormal heart rhythms, and even death. Puppies and kittens are the ones most likely to chew on electrical cords and lights; however, any pet can chew on the cords, so monitor your pets and the lights closely during the holidays. Unplug lights at night or while away from the home. If you see your pet actively chewing on electrical cords or find evidence of chewed cords, seek veterinary care immediately.

> Article contributed by veterinary personnel at FT Sill, OK

Enjoy this holiday season by celebrating with family and our four-legged friends. Knowledge about common decorating dangers will prevent unwanted accidents and keep your pets safe this holiday season and through the winter.



Holiday Plants

The holidays are a time when pets can get into trouble by eating treats, playing with decorations, and snacking on holiday plants and ornamentals. The National Pet Poison Helpline is frequently contacted by dog and cat owners who are concerned that their pet ate part of a plant. But which ones are actually toxic? You should know which are the most toxic so that you avoid placing them in your home or, if that is not possible, know when to seek veterinary care if you think your pet has been exposed. If you suspect your pet has eaten a toxic plant, contact your veterinarian for advice.

Lilies: Most species of lilies are toxic to cats. They are known to cause acute kidney failure and even death. The most toxic lilies are Tiger, Day, Asiatic, Easter, and Japanese Show lilies. Less toxic varieties include Peace, Peruvian, and Calla lilies. The less toxic types contain calcium oxalate crystals, which cause excessive drooling resulting from irritation to the mouth, tongue, pharynx, and esophagus. Seek veterinary care immediately if your pet eats any part of the lily or even water from its vase. Treatment may include inducing vomiting, giving activated charcoal, evaluating and monitoring kidney function, hospitalization, intravenous fluid therapy, and supportive care.

Plants: Holly berries and mistletoe are types of plants that are mildly to moderately toxic to pets. Christmas or English holly can make the stomach upset due to irritation from the spiny leaves. Potentially toxic substances that are in these plants (saponins, methylxanthines, and cyanogens) can lead to severe vomiting and diarrhea when eaten.

English, Japanese, and Chinese holly cause toxicity from the



saponins in the plant. The signs you will most likely see if your pet has eaten any of these plants are drooling, shaking the head excessively, and lip smacking. Certain European varieties of mistletoe cause signs of gastrointestinal irritation. If eaten in large enough amounts, they can result in low blood pressure, abnormal heart rate, collapse, the appearance of walking drunk, seizures, and sometimes death. The American mistletoe, when eaten by cats and dogs, usually only causes lethargy and vomiting or, less frequently, diarrhea. Keep these plants out of your pet's reach.

Poinsettias: Although poinsettias are commonly known to be poisonous to pets, they actually only cause mild signs such as drooling, vomiting, skin irritation (itching, swelling, and redness), and possibly eye irritation, which generally don't require medical treatment.

Other indoor plants: The umbrella tree and philodendron are very common house plants that contain toxic insoluble calcium oxalates. These plants cause drooling, pawing at the mouth, and eye and skin irritation. The mouth should be flushed out, and if the pet can drink, milk will help alleviate the symptoms. The Kalanchoe is a flowering plant that causes a low heart rate, depression, and weakness. If eaten, your pet should receive veterinary care immediately and may need to be hospitalized for monitoring and care. Finally, the Sago palm is extremely toxic to dogs, causing liver damage and gastrointestinal irritation, with a 50% survival rate. Seek veterinary care immediately if you suspect your pet has eaten any part of this plant, including the seeds, which are the most toxic part. There are many ornamental plants and trees that are toxic to our pets. The ASPCA does maintain a reference list of toxic and non-toxic plants and trees. The Animal Poison Control Center helpline number is 855-764-7661 and is open 24/7, but you may incur fees when contacting this helpline.

“ If you suspect your pet has eaten a toxic plant, contact your veterinarian for advice. ”

> Article contributed by veterinary personnel at FT Leavenworth, KS

Let's Talk Turkey

As the holiday season quickly approaches, many of us are looking to spend some quality time with family and friends. Nothing draws us closer together than enjoying a delicious home-cooked meal with the ones we love, but things can take a turn for the worse if food safety is not kept in mind.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 48 million people get sick from foodborne illnesses each year. Of those who become ill, 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die. Below are a few tips to keep you, your family, and your friends safe during the holidays.

Know how long each food takes to thaw, prepare, and cook to avoid any time or temperature mishaps.

Do not combine shopping for your foods with holiday gift shopping.

There are three ways to thaw a turkey: in the refrigerator, in a sink of cold water that is changed every 30 minutes, or in the microwave. A frozen turkey is safe indefinitely, but a thawing turkey must defrost at a safe temperature. When the turkey is left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours, its temperature can creep into the danger zone between 40°Fahrenheit (F) and 140°F, where bacteria can grow rapidly.

For optimum safety, stuffing a turkey is not recommended. For more even cooking, it is recommended you cook your stuffing outside the bird. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the stuffing. The stuffing must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

If you choose to stuff your turkey, prepare ingredients ahead of time; however, keep wet and dry ingredients separate. Chill all of the wet ingredients (butter/margarine, cooked celery and onions, broth, and so forth). Mix wet and dry ingredients just before filling the turkey cavities. Fill the cavities loosely, and cook the turkey immediately. Use a food thermometer to make sure the center of the stuffing reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

Cook your turkey to the proper internal temperature. Always use a calibrated metal-stem food thermometer to check temperatures, and measure at the thickest part of the food. Set the oven temperature to

at least 325°F. Place the completely thawed turkey with the breast side up in a roasting pan that is 2 to 2½ inches deep. Cooking times will vary depending on the weight of the bird. To make sure the turkey has reached a safe internal temperature of 165°F, check by using a food thermometer inserted into the center of the stuffing and the thickest portions of the breast, thigh, and wing joint. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before removing all stuffing from the cavity and carving the meat.



“ There will be lots of preparation for big meals and shared bounty, so following these food safety precautions can assure wonderful gatherings and memories in your home. ”

Refrigerate leftovers at 40°F or below as soon as possible and within 2 hours of preparation to prevent food spoilage and possible foodborne illnesses.

Always remember to wash and sanitize counters, cutting boards, utensils, and any other surfaces that will come in contact with food. Ensure you are using warm, soapy water. After washing, wipe or spray with a bleach solution and allow to air dry. To get the proper concentration of bleach, add ½ tablespoon bleach to 1 gallon of water.

Always allow food-contact surfaces to air dry after sanitizing instead

of wiping dry. Immediately clean up spilled foods. When serving foods, always use a clean plate, and separate serving utensils for each food item.

Practice good personal hygiene by washing your hands with soap and water after every chance of contamination: before handling food; when switching foods during preparation; and after smoking, eating, touching any part of the body, taking out the trash, playing with pets, or taking breaks. Use water as hot as you can comfortably handle and sing the Happy Birthday song to yourself in your head while washing. This will ensure you are washing your hands long enough (20 seconds).

Bandage any cuts on your hands. Do your best to keep hair out of foods by wearing hats or tying up long hair. Keep fingernails neatly trimmed and clean. Remove jewelry from your hands and wrists before preparing food.

The holiday season is a very special time to spend with family and friends. There will be lots of preparation for big meals and shared bounty, so following these food safety precautions can assure wonderful gatherings and memories in your home.

Toxic Foods for Family Pets

With the upcoming holiday season, families may be tempted to share seasonal goodies with their four-legged family members. What many people may not know is that several of these treats can actually be toxic to cats and dogs.

A common candy during the holiday season is **chocolate**, which contains a substance called methylxanthine. This can cause dogs to experience vomiting, diarrhea, seizures, and even death. Dark chocolate, especially baking chocolate, is the most dangerous type of chocolate for dogs because it contains the highest level of this substance. Therefore, take extra precautions to secure the chocolate in closed containers and to ensure it is out of reach of your pets at all times.

A newer problem is **sugar-free foods**. They may contain an artificial sweetener called xylitol, which can be found in some gum, candies, toothpastes, and even peanut butter. This causes severe low blood sugar levels in pets, which you may first notice as tiredness, vomiting, or seizures, which can lead to death if not treated. Even a partial pack of gum can make a dog very sick. This artificial sweetener is found in many products. Please check the labels carefully before feeding your pet a product labeled as sugar-free or ones containing artificial sweeteners.

Grapes and raisins (two foods commonly found in nut and fruit mixes, on fruit trays, and used in baking) can also pose a grave danger to your pets. If your pet eats sufficient quantities, it can lead to kidney failure. The toxic substance within the grapes/raisins has not yet been determined, but they still pose a threat to a pet's health. If there are fruit trays out for holiday snacking or meals, keep them out of reach and away from pets.

Onions and garlic can be very dangerous to cats and also to dogs if they eat large amounts. These foods cause the red blood cells to break apart (a process called hemolysis) making cats and dogs anemic. If your pet loses enough red blood cells, they can become very ill and die. If you suspect your pet may have eaten these foods, seek help from your veterinarian immediately. The veterinarian will perform basic laboratory tests to help determine if your pet has anemia and if this may be a symptom and/or cause of your pet's illness.

Cookies containing **macadamia nuts** may also be found at holiday parties. As few as six raw macadamia nuts can cause muscle tremors, weakness, vomiting, or a rapid heart rate in your pet.

Lastly, as tempting as it may be, do not share **table scraps** containing **bones or fat trimmings** with the family dog. The extra fat can cause an illness called pancreatitis, which may cause vomiting, abdominal pain, and in severe cases can be fatal. Bones can lodge in the animal's mouth or throat, becoming a choking hazard, causing tears in the esophagus or even a blockage of the gastrointestinal system.

If your pet has eaten any food off of the naughty list, call a veterinarian as soon as possible. Some pets may only require minimal treatment, but some may need hospitalization for more supportive care and medical management. If in doubt about giving a pet a new treat or holiday snack, always check with your veterinarian to make sure the treat is safe for them to eat in order to make sure that your furry loved one stays happy and healthy this holiday season!

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> Article contributed by veterinary personnel at FT Leonard Wood, MO

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- Veterinary Connections is a quarterly publication written by Army Veterinary Services personnel and published by the Army Public Health Center to inform and educate Service members, beneficiaries, and retirees about Animal Health, Food Safety, and One Health.
- One Health refers to the intersection and overlap between animals, humans, and the environment.
- Army Veterinary Services personnel serve around the world supporting the Department of Defense as proponents for Animal Health and Food Protection.

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