

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KEEP YOUR PETS HAPPY AND HEALTHY ALL DECEMBER LONG

Veterinarians at the Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center offer pet safety tips for the holiday season.

CHICAGO, ILL., December 17, 2013... The winter holidays are a high-traffic time for pet emergency rooms according to the veterinarians at Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center (www.ChicagoPetEmergency.com). “Each year, we treat hundreds of pets during December, many of whom have gotten into trouble due to holiday decorations, celebrations or food,” said Dr. Jerry Klein, Supervising Veterinarian at Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center. “Pet owners can take some simple precautions to help keep their pets out of the emergency room and keep the holidays a happy time for all.”

Watch out for these common holiday hazards:

1. Food & Beverage Dangers

Many of the foods we enjoy this time of the year can be dangerous to pets. Fatty meats, poultry skin, bones, onion, avocado and more can lead to serious health problems or even death for pets. The same is true for alcohol, soft drinks, tea and other beverages. As little as one ounce of alcohol can kill a small cat or dog. Alcohol can be found in many baked goods, such as fruit cake, so be careful of those as well.

2. Chocolate, Candy and Gum

Chocolate is toxic to both cats and dogs. The darker the chocolate, the more dangerous it is to your pets. Baking chocolate and dark chocolate are especially problematic. Hard candies, such as candy canes, can cause choking, or stomach upset. Sugar-free candy and gum with the artificial sweetener Xylitol can be deadly for pets.

3. Garbage

Garbage cans, both indoors and outdoors, can contain dangerous food and non-food items. Pets are attracted by the odors and given the opportunity will try to get at what's inside. It's best to promptly remove kitchen trash and keep outdoor garbage cans sealed tightly. Pets that get into the garbage can suffer stomach upset, get items lodged in their stomach, or even be poisoned by rotten food or foods that are fine for people, but toxic to animals.

4. Holiday Crowds

New people and lots of doors opening and closing can alarm even mild-mannered pets. It's best to keep pets away from the door or on a leash when visitors arrive and depart. Make sure all your pets wear a collar and tags and are microchipped to help them be reunited with you should they get out.

5. Purses and bags

Curious animals love to find out what's in unattended purses and bags. They will consume gum, candy, medicine and just about anything else they can find in a purse. This can lead to illness or even death.

Keep purses securely closed and out of the reach of pets. If you carry medication in your purse, veterinarians ask that you be aware of the name of the medication, the dose and the quantity in the purse. This information can be critical in treating pets that get into it. The same is true if you have candy or gum in your purse.

6. Decorations

Tinsel, ornaments, candles and just about anything else that glimmers, flickers, or sways can become an enticing toy for pets. Cats in particular

love to pounce on anything that moves. Keep valued and breakable ornaments and decorations well out of the reach of pets. Be especially careful with long, string-like decorations such as tinsel, which can get lodged in throats and digestive tracts, requiring surgery to remove. Keep pets from chewing Christmas light wires by coating them with bitter-tasting, pet-friendly spray to prevent chewing (available at most veterinarian offices and pet stores).

7. Christmas Trees

Watch pets closely during the first few days with a new tree in the house. Aside from the obvious danger (and hassle) of a tipped-over tree, ingested needles can block airways and intestines. Evergreens also contain harmful chemicals in the bark and sap, which can leech into the tree's water supply. To avoid problems, be sure to change the water regularly and, if possible, lay a wire screen or other cover over the top of the tree stand to keep pets out.

8. Holiday Plants

Many holiday plants are toxic to pets. Chief offenders include mistletoe, holly, ivy, chrysanthemums, azaleas, juniper, evergreen, and amaryllis. Toxicity varies, but its best to keep live plants out of reach of your pets. Despite popular belief, poinsettias are not toxic, but like other non-toxic flowers, they can cause vomiting, choking, and diarrhea if too much is ingested. And please remember that all lilies are highly-toxic to cats and should never be brought into their homes.

9. Pet Toys & Costumes

Well-meaning friends and relatives may bring pets a gift for the holiday. Make certain that any item given to your pet is designed specifically for animals. Stuffed toys meant for children do not have the strong stitching necessary to withstand your pet's powerful teeth.

Pet costumes and sweaters should be simple, with no dangling strings, ribbons, bells or other decorations. Pets should be able to move freely, and there should never be any kind of tight fastener around the neck. If your pet doesn't seem to like a holiday costume or sweater, take it off. You can introduce it gradually over several days, with just a few minutes of wear each day.

10. Pet Treats

The FDA continues to investigate consumer complaints of jerky treats making pets ill. Out of an abundance of caution, pet owners may want to opt for another style of treat until the issue is resolved. Many veterinarians recommend using vegetables, such as carrots and green beans, as treats.

Who To Call

If a pet gets into something it shouldn't, pet owners are encouraged to contact their veterinarian or Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center at 773-281-7110. Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center is open 24 hours, every day of the year.

About the Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center

Staffed by highly trained specialists and equipped with the latest technology, Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center is always open – 24 hours, every day of the year. Chicago's oldest and largest pet emergency facility, the Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center provides advanced emergency, critical and specialty care for cats and dogs. Each year the center treats more than 11,000 cats and dogs in its emergency room and thousands more are cared for by veterinary specialists.

In addition to emergency veterinarians and staff, Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center offers board-certified veterinarians who specialize in

cardiology, dentistry, dermatology, diagnostic imaging, internal medicine, neurology, oncology, ophthalmology and surgery. This state-of-the art facility includes ultrasound and MRI equipment, specialized surgical suites, a blood bank, specialized oxygen cages, heart monitors and more. A veterinary cancer and rehabilitation center is located across the street. Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center has been providing emergency care for cats and dogs since 1978.

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