

Keep Your Dog Safe This Christmas!

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Christmas Dangers to Dogs

Christmas time is a time for celebration, and for spending time with our loved ones. Our dogs are part of our family and enjoy the festive occasion too, however this time of year can be particularly dangerous for them. There are risks associated with the festive season that aren't a problem at other times of the year, and you need to be aware of them.

This short report hopes to inform you of these risks, so you can keep your four legged family member safe and well.



Pancreatitis

It's not uncommon for dogs to develop pancreatitis after a hearty Christmas lunch.

The pancreas is part of the digestive system, and produces enzymes which travel down a small duct into the small intestine. There it is involved in digesting food. It also produces insulin, which is important in glucose regulation.

The exact cause of pancreatitis isn't known but it can often develop after a meal with a high fat content, such as ham or gravy. Dogs that are obese seem to be predisposed to pancreatitis. Again, the reason for this isn't known.

When a dog develops pancreatitis, the digestive enzymes are activated before they should be, and start to digest the pancreas itself.

Symptoms of pancreatitis are vague. Dogs are usually depressed and restless, with a severe tummy ache. However, dogs may just have a bit of a fever and appear otherwise normal. The problem with this condition is that the severity of the symptoms doesn't always correlate to the severity of the illness. Dogs have died of pancreatitis while showing virtually no sign of being unwell.

If you suspect your dog has pancreatitis, see your veterinarian as soon as you can. Treatment involves fluids, pain relief and often antibiotics. He may have to stay in hospital for several days. It can be fatal, so don't waste time.

To protect your dog, don't feed fatty table scraps, stick to his regular diet, and tell your visiting family and friends that your veterinarian forbids table scraps and leftovers.



Snow Globes and Antifreeze

There have been rumors for many years that snow globes contain antifreeze, and if they break and a dog licks up the liquid, they can be poisoned.

Antifreeze initially causes depression and vomiting within a matter of hours, however this is the least of your dog's worries. In your dog's body, the antifreeze is converted to a more toxic chemical, which causes kidney failure within a couple of days. If a dog develops kidney failure, they don't usually survive.

There's no real way of being sure that there's no antifreeze in a snow globe, and if there is, how much there is. It's safest to keep snow globes out of reach of your dog and clean up any spills if there is a breakage.

If you live in a cold climate, you may use antifreeze in your car. If it leaks from the engine and your dog licks it up, he can also become ill.



Festive Foliage

Many people believe that Poinsettia is very toxic to dogs. There is, however, no need to banish these attractive plants from your home this Christmas. They're actually not as dangerous as we may think, but they can make a dog quite ill.

The plant can irritate the mouth and gastrointestinal tract of a dog that chews on it, leading to drooling, vomiting and diarrhea. It's usually not very severe and dogs usually recover very well.

Mistletoe can also affect your dog, and this can be more serious. American and European species of mistletoe are available which vary in toxicity. So, how sick your dog will get depends on the species of mistletoe, and how many berries he eats.

Some mistletoe can cause an upset stomach, with vomiting; however others may lead to liver failure and seizures. Holly is another popular Christmas plant. If your dog eats the berries, he can develop severe vomiting and diarrhea, and become very depressed.

Festive plants really do add to your home's Christmas decor, but do keep them well out of reach of your dog.



Ribbon and Tinsel

Christmas gifts are often wrapped in pretty ribbon, and we usually drape sparkling tinsel over our Christmas tree. Both of these can lead to serious illness if you have a dog who likes to chew things.

If your dog swallows a string like object, it can become caught in the gastr intestinal tract, often in the stomach. The body continues move the other end of the ribbon through, and this can lead to the intestine telescoping in on itself, or becoming lacerated by the ribbon.

Symptoms are similar to those of other gastrointestinal foreign bodies - your dog will vomit, become quite depressed and have a tummy ache.

This is a life threatening emergency, and your dog will need surgery to remove the ribbon or tinsel.

If your dog likes playing with ribbon or tinsel, supervise him well, and keep these things out of his reach when you're not there.

If you see your dog eat something string like, contact your veterinarian straight away - he may be able to make your dog vomit it up, and avoid the need for surgery.



Christmas Tree Dangers

The Christmas tree is one of the highlights of Christmas for adults and children alike. It also poses a few hazards to your dog.

An enthusiastic puppy that tugs and pulls at the cord for the tree lights could pull the tree over on top of himself. Broken glass ornaments can cause cuts to the feet and other parts of the body.

It's even more dangerous if your dog likes to chew, and decides to nibble on the electric light cord. He could receive a severe electric shock if the cord is plugged into a socket. This can cause severe burns to the roof of the mouth and tongue, which can ulcerate and slough. This will be really painful and your dog will have trouble eating.

If the shock is severe enough, it can cause unconsciousness, and may be fatal. Electric shock can lead to fluid build up in the lungs, and severe difficulty breathing.

Many people with live trees add chemicals to the water in the tree's stand to extend its life. If your dog drinks this water, he may become ill. It's a good idea not to add anything to the tree water.

Keeping your pup safe around the Christmas tree isn't too difficult. You may be able to put a decorative fence around the tree and keep your dog away. Alternatively, crate train your dog so he's safe while you can't directly supervise him.

It's also a good idea to put PVC pipe around any electrical cords to stop your dog chewing them. You can also buy bitter sprays to deter dogs, but I've found them not always very effective.



Christmas Treats

Christmas is always associated with lots of yummy things to eat. Your dog will also enjoy treats, but some aren't so good for his health.

Chocolate contains theobromine which can cause vomiting, diarrhea and hyperactivity in your dog. Symptoms start within 6-12 hours of your dog eating the chocolate, and in severe cases, may lead to coma and death.

Different chocolates contain different amounts of theobromine, with dark or cooking chocolate being the most toxic. Half of a 1/2 lb block of dark chocolate contains enough theobromine to be dangerous to a 20lb dog.

Those delicious Christmas cakes we enjoy are often made with raisins or sultanas. These too are toxic to your dog. Some dogs can eat raisins and sultanas with no problems, yet others become very ill, and it's not really known why. It also appears that there's no relationship between how much sultanas are eaten and how sick your dog will get.

Raisins and sultanas can cause kidney failure, and if it's not caught early enough, it may be fatal.

Do your dog a big favor and keep the chocolate and Christmas cake for yourself!!

If you share a turkey at Christmas, be sure not to give your dog the leftover bones. Cooked bones are a big no-no for dogs, as they can splinter and scratch the gastrointestinal tract.



Recreational Drugs

One of the nice parts of Christmas is the chance to relax and share a drink with family and friends. However, your dog may also enjoy a nip! - Dogs have been known to steal a drink from unattended glasses. Wine and beer don't seem to be very attractive to them, and they also don't contain a high enough percentage of alcohol, so they're not likely to cause a problem. Spirits are more of a problem - dogs seem to like the sweet and creamy liqueurs.

Alcohol has the same effect on your dog as it does on you. He'll be wobbly on his feet, a bit slow to get around and maybe a bit depressed. It may seem a bit funny, but if your dog has drunk enough alcohol, he may fall into a coma and have a cardiac arrest.

Marijuana is a popular recreational drug, and it's not usually toxic to people. Dogs appear to be much more susceptible to the effects of the drug, and are more likely to show severe symptoms. Dogs usually become affected when they eat cookies made with marijuana. Within an hour, they are vomiting, agitated, and yelping or barking. They also often lose control of their bladder. This can last up to two days, and if your dog eats enough cookies, he may develop seizures and die.

Your veterinarian can treat both these conditions with activated charcoal, fluids and sedatives if necessary and the outcome is usually very good. However, it's better to prevent your dog becoming ill in the first place, so be sure to keep your goodies to yourself.



Cold Weather

In some parts of the world, Christmas brings snow, ice and harsh weather.

If your dog is an outside dog, and you don't want to bring him indoors, make sure he has shelter from wind and rain, and warm bedding in his kennel.

Keep an eye on your dog's outdoor water bowl and make sure it doesn't freeze solid.

Some dogs don't like to go for walks in the snow, and he may appreciate some little booties to protect his feet.

Lastly, don't bathe your dog unless you absolutely have to. There are some powder shampoos which can help keep him clean, and you may want to add omega fatty acid supplements to his diet to prevent his skin and coat from drying out.



Hot Weather

Other parts of the world have a hot summer, and they have the opposite problem. Dogs don't sweat, and rely on panting to keep their body temperature down. If they can't keep themselves cool, they can overheat and this can be fatal.

If your dog does develop heat stroke, resist the temptation to douse them with cold water. This will constrict the blood vessels on the surface of the skin, which will reduce blood flow through them, so there is less chance for heat to dissipate from the skin surface. It's much better to soak your dog with tepid water, and put him in front of a breeze or a fan to cool down.

Even if he looks okay, pop along to your veterinarian for a checkup, because heat-related organ damage may not show up straight away.

Prevent heat stroke by keeping your dog in the shade and making sure he has access to cool water at all times. Take him for a walk in the cool of the morning or evening, and avoid exercising him in the middle of the day.



Fireworks

Christmas, and in particular New Year's Eve, is a time for fireworks. Unfortunately, many dogs are lost when they become frightened of the noise, and escape from their yard.

To prevent your dog escaping, make sure he's securely confined. Ideally, this means he's inside your house, either in a crate, or locked in a room such as the laundry. It's unlikely he'll escape under these circumstances.

If he does need to stay outside, be sure your fence is in good condition. Have a sturdy collar on your dog, make sure it won't slip over his head, and chain or tie him to his kennel.

There are other things you can do well before the Christmas period to be prepared if your dog does escape. Have him micro chipped, and have a current ID tag on his collar. Hopefully you won't need it, but take a good clear photograph of him, so it's easy to make posters and share his description online.

