

Holiday HAZARDS

SAFETY TIPS FROM A VETERINARIAN

By: Dr. Heidi Hottinger, DACVS and Kate Lawrence
www.gcvcs.com



The holiday season is a time for celebration and family...including the four-legged members of your family! However, the holiday season can also present unique and challenging safety hazards for your furry family member.

Some of the dangers are pretty obvious, like puppies knocking over the Christmas tree, or kitty whiskers burned from a Menorah candle. But there are other dangers that are not as easily noticed during the holiday season. For example, both cats and dogs think that chewing on the extra plugs and cords lying around is a fun way to pass the time, unfortunately that “fun” can lead to serious consequences, like serious burns and even electrocution! In addition, many seasonal and decorative plants can be

toxic to animals. Plants such as poinsettias, mistletoe and holly are common this time of year, and should be placed away from areas where cats and dogs can reach them.

Regarding your pet's holiday diet, it's very tempting to treat your dog or cat with their own holiday dinner, however, the introduction of the rich people food can often lead to GI upset, which is less than ideal during the celebration! Additionally, many pets (cats in particular)

LOVE to play with, chew on, and eat many of your holiday decorations, such as tinsel, beads, and ornament hooks. This can lead to a blockage in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, and requires emergency surgery. In addition to giving “people food” to animals, some pet owners give their pets a leftover turkey bone, or pork bone, etc., to chew on. This can cause the same type of GI upset as outlined above, and also carries the risk of blocking the GI tract, or even perforating (puncturing) the intestines. Finally, many people give holiday treats and candies this time of year, and many of these candies and treats can be hazardous to pets. Chocolate is never a good idea for pets, and often hard candies and gum contain Xylitol as a sweetener, which is innocuous for people, but is very toxic to cats and

dogs.

Possibly the most common issue seen by veterinarians during the holidays is mentioned several times in the tips above – pets who have eaten something inappropriate, from tinsel to turkey bones, and end up very sick. You should consider seeking veterinary care for your pet if they develop vomiting, poor appetite, diarrhea, lethargy, or disorientation. Your family veterinarian may wish to conduct testing such as blood work, radiographs (x-rays), or ultrasound exams to help diagnose your pet's condition. The results of those tests will help guide treatment recommendations for your pet, and may even indicate that surgery is the best option for your pet – especially if you suspect your dog or cat ingested an object that is causing an obstruction (blockage) of the stomach or intestines. This type of surgery is usually time sensitive, so be prepared to make rapid decisions if emergency surgery is recommended! Be vigilant and plan your holiday decorations and celebration to be as safe as possible for the four-legged members of your family. Everyone celebrates the holidays with their own unique traditions and festivities, and safety should be an integral part of every family's holiday habits. Prevention is the key to keeping your furry friends happy and healthy this season.

Happy Holidays from Gulf Coast
Veterinary Specialists, and be safe!