

Holiday Pet Care Tips

Here are 10 ways to keep your pets safe during holiday festivities:

1. The New Pet

Holidays are not the best time to introduce a new pet to the household. All the excitement, noise and deviation from the normal routine could make it difficult for a new pet—and any existing pets—to make the adjustment. Discuss with a veterinarian pet breeds and best approaches to finding a suitable pet for your home and family

2. Pets as Gifts

Consider seriously the choice to give a pet as a gift. One of the main reasons animals are abandoned or taken to shelters is because they are unwanted. Don't contribute to this situation by giving a pet to someone who may not want it or is not able to properly care for it. If you do choose to give a pet as a gift, allow the recipient(s) to select the pet so that they can find one that is right for them. Again, your veterinarian is a great resource for pet selection.

3. Food, Alcohol, Chocolate & Treats

Keep holiday treats and candies out of your pet's reach as they can make your pet quite sick. Candy wrappers can cause digestive upset if eaten.

Because alcohol is rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream, it affects pets quickly. Ingestion of alcohol can cause dangerous drops in blood sugar, blood pressure and body temperature. Intoxicated animals can experience seizures and respiratory failure.

Potentially harmful foods include: coffee grounds, chocolate, tea, alcohol, hops, salt, onions and onion powder, grapes and raisins, avocado, garlic, and macadamia nuts.

Chocolate, particularly unsweetened, dark, bittersweet and baking chocolate, can be toxic to pets, especially dogs, who are more prone to eat it. If your dog eats chocolate, you're your

veterinarian or animal poison control center contact immediately, as treatment may need to be rendered immediately. Symptoms of toxicity include excitement, nervousness, trembling, vomiting, diarrhea, excessive thirst or urination, muscle spasms and seizures.

Keep gum, candy or breath fresheners containing the sweetener xylitol away from your dog. When a dog eats even a small amount of xylitol, it causes a surge of insulin, and the animal's blood sugar may drop quickly and dangerously. Cases of liver damage have also been associated with ingestion of xylitol. Again, contact your veterinarian and/or your animal poison control center if any of these treats have been ingested by a pet.

4. Leftovers

Don't feed your pet holiday turkey or chicken, as the small bones or fragments can lodge in the throat, stomach, or intestinal tract. Fatty leftovers such as turkey skin can trigger inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis), a life threatening disease. At the very least, too much human food may give your pet an upset stomach.

5. Guests

Pets can become overexcited, confused or frightened by holiday guests. Keep pets in a quiet part of the house. When guests are over, watch for open doors and make sure your pets have proper identification in case they do get out. Remind your guests that your normally friendly pet may want to be left alone. Your veterinarian can discuss with you proper pet identification and best pet social control methods.

6. Christmas Tree

Make sure your tree is well secured. Avoid adding preservatives, aspirin or sugar to your tree's water, or keep the water covered. Tidy up around your tree and wreaths as sharp pine needles can puncture your pet if ingested.

7. Holiday Decorations

Holiday decorations such as breakable ornaments and dreidels should be kept out of reach of pets, as should tinsel, string, and ribbon. If your pet ingests any of these items, it could experience serious internal injuries, or worse.

Light strands, loose wires and electric cords can be a serious hazard to your pet, especially puppies, who may chew them.

Recently, imported snow globes were found to contain antifreeze (ethylene glycol). As little as one teaspoon of antifreeze when ingested by a cat or a tablespoon or two for a dog (depending on their size), can be fatal. Signs of early poisoning include acting drunk or uncoordinated, excessive thirst, and lethargy.

8. Plants

Mistletoe and holly berries are poisonous and should be kept out of reach of pets. If eaten, poinsettia plants can cause severe gastrointestinal upset. Again, contact your veterinarian and/or animal poison control center if you suspect the pet has ingested one of these plants.

9. Candles

Never leave candles unattended, especially around puppies and kittens that may accidentally get too close to candles and cause them to tip over.

10. Stress

The holidays can be a stressful time for everyone, even your pets. Even though your routine might change, try to keep your pets on their normal routine of feeding and exercise. Some pets might not mind "dressing up" for the holidays, but, for others, it could be a stressful experience best avoided

(Article developed in cooperation with the Oregon Veterinary Medical Assn.)