

Top Household Toxins Affecting Dogs

Veterinary Pet Insurance reveals the top household toxins that harm dogs and cats ranked by number of claims.

Posted: March 24, 2008, 5 a.m. EST

Veterinary Pet Insurance of Brea, Calif., recently reported that it received more claims for drug reactions from human medications than all other poisoning claims combined in 2007.

Other top household toxins, ranked by the number of claims VPI received in 2007, are as follows:

Drug Reactions (3,455 claims) Many of these claims involved pets given drugs intended for human consumption, such as over-the-counter pain relievers. Pet owners often give pets over-the-counter or prescription drugs for their ailments, unaware that they can be harmful to the pet, according to VPI.

Rodenticide (870 claims) Even if these poisons (often in pellet form) are placed away from pets, rodents can carry them to pet-occupied areas. The taste and smell of rodenticides is designed to appeal to small animals.

Methylxanthine (755 claims) This includes theobromine and caffeine, both of which are common ingredients in chocolate. Toxic amounts of theobromine can cause vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, hyperactivity, abnormal rhythms of the heart, or seizures in pets. Unsweetened baking chocolate contains much higher levels of theobromine than milk chocolate, causing toxicity with the consumption of much smaller amounts.

Plant Poisoning (466 claims) Toxic plants include sago palms, tulips, oleander, hyacinths, poinsettias, azaleas, lilies, and amaryllis. Onions, grapes, and raisins are also categorized under the company's plant toxicity code.

Household Chemicals (313 claims) This includes bleach, liquid potpourri, deodorant, and other toiletries. Pets are attracted to bright colors and strong odors, according to VPI.

Metaldyhyde (88 claims) A deadly component of snail bait. Signs usually occur quickly and include vomiting and whole body tremors.

Organophosphate (60 claims) This group of insecticides works to inactivate acetylcholinesterase, which is essential to nerve function in insects and pets. Ingestion can occur through skin absorption or oral intake.

Toad Poisoning (58 claims) Some species of toad, particularly along the Gulf Coast, secrete a toxic substance when threatened or licked by dogs.

Heavy Metals (48 claims) This includes mercury, lead, or excessive amounts of zinc, iron, cobalt, and copper. Pets may be exposed to heavy metals through lead-based paint, ingestion of pennies coined after 1982, vitamins, soil contamination, or water pollutants.

Antifreeze (36 claims) Antifreeze has a sweet taste which can be appealing to pets. VPI notes that most people are aware of the poisonous potential of antifreeze, but they may be unaware a pool collecting from a leak beneath a car.

"Pet owners should be aware of the symptoms of poisoning — vomiting, drooling, seizures — and be familiar with the location of an animal emergency clinic," said Carol McConnell, DVM, vice president and chief veterinary medical officer for VPI, adding that treatment for poisoning can cost hundreds of dollars.