

New Findings Show Toxic Mold May Affect Dogs

Two cats died of exposure to toxic mold, and a similar reaction could be likely in dogs.

Marissa Heflin

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Toxic mold may be a new health concern for cat and dog owners, according to a report published in the Sept. 1, 2007, issue of the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assn., which outlines what is believed to be the first documented case of toxic black mold poisoning in pets.

Douglas Mader, DVM, of Marathon Veterinary Hospital in Florida, and co-author of the study, was performing routine dental procedures on two healthy, indoor Himalayan cats — examinations conducted prior to the dental cleanings showed no indications of illness — when he noticed a frothy blood within the endotracheal tubes used to supply anesthesia to the two cat siblings.

Mader immediately stopped the procedures. However, one cat died the following day and the other about two weeks later.

“The circumstances of these cases are just not heard of,” Mader says. “Anesthesia doesn’t cause pulmonary hemorrhage.”

Blood collected prior to the cats’ death was tested and showed the presence of the toxin produced by *Stachybotrys chartarum*, also known as toxic black mold, which can cause respiratory-related health problems, pulmonary hemorrhage and death in people, Mader says.

He says he suspected the mold because they live in an area that had been devastated by hurricane and flooding. After questioning the pet owners, Mader found out that their home had sustained water damage during a hurricane in October 2005, seven months prior to the development of pulmonary hemorrhage. Mader asked the pet owners to check their home for mold.

“Sure enough, they had very severe mold contamination in their walls,” he says. The walls have since been gutted and replaced.

The pet owners’ other two pets, another cat and a dog, appeared fine, but Mader says that if they had undergone the same procedure it is possible that they may have experienced the same thing as the two cats.

Although toxic black mold poisoning in pets has never been documented before, Mader says he suspects that this is not the first case.

It’s possible that the symptoms have been there, which can range from mild respiratory disease to pulmonary trauma, but was attributed to other things, he says. There’s also no commercial test available, he adds.

Mader says that veterinarians should ask pet owners about mold, especially those in high-risk environments.

“I think any veterinarian living in an area where there is high humidity or previous exposure to flood or water damage needs to put this on their list of what we call history questions,” he says. “When they check an animal in and do any kind of preoperative physical examination, they need to include, ‘Are you aware of any exposure to mold in your house?’”

However, cat and dog owners also need to share this information with their veterinarians, Mader says.

“I think the most important thing is for clients to be aware of things in their environment that could potentially impact the health of animals,” he says. “They need to let their veterinarian know.”

Mader and co-author Dorr Dearborn, Ph.D., MD, of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, plan to look into validating a test for toxic mold that can be used for commercial laboratories.