

Holiday Pet Safety Tips



Animals as Gifts

The holidays are a popular time for welcoming a new furry friend into your family. There may not be a greater gift for homeless animals than to open your heart and home to them. As they do year-round, animal rescue groups have thousands of wonderful companions available for adoption.

But whether you are considering a new friend for you or someone else, remember that choosing an animal is a big decision. Instead of bringing home an animal right away, consider putting together and wrapping an "adoption kit." Fill a box with toys, a bed, a leash, a collar, food, treats and a gift certificate for adoption fees from your favorite rescue group. Then, make an event of visiting the shelter to find your next best friend!

Decorations

Holidays bring special cards, gifts decorated with ribbons, tinsel or yarn, and special decorations like Christmas trees. Unfortunately, animals appreciate these items, as well — and many of them can cause serious damage.

Christmas Trees

- Anchor trees securely. Climbing cats and dogs with wagging tails can knock over your tree.
- Hang breakable, glass ornaments well out of reach. The small glass and metal fastenings can be stepped on or even swallowed by your pet.
- Keep tinsel, ribbons and garland out of pets' reach, especially cats that are intrigued by them. These can become lodged in their intestines, cause obstructions and lead to surgery or death.
- Clean up pine needles frequently. They can be toxic when eaten by your pet.
- Prevent your pet from drinking water in the tree stand if you have added preservative chemicals. These can be poisonous to pets. Also, stagnant water can contain bacteria, which may lead to vomiting and diarrhea if ingested.

Holiday House Plants

Although they add a warm touch, many plants can harm your pets. Keep these potentially dangerous bloomers well out of reach.

- Lilies can be deadly to cats, and many types can cause cats to have kidney failure.
- Poinsettias, although not as toxic as people often think, can upset your pet's digestive system.
- Mistletoe, especially the berries, is highly toxic, can cause stomach upset and has the potential to cause fatal heart problems.
- Holly can cause vomiting, diarrhea, nausea and lethargy.
- Certain types of ivy, such as English ivy, can also cause severe harm.
- Amaryllis can cause vomiting and diarrhea.
- Hibiscus can cause diarrhea.

Lights, Candles and Fragrance

- Keep lights and extension cords safely secured or covered to deter chewing, which can lead to electric shock or even electrocution. Better yet, invest in pet-proof extension cords, or spray with products such as Bitter Apple or Chew Stop.
- Candles can be fragrant and enticing to pets. But they can be a fire hazard if knocked over by an exuberant pet.
- Liquid potpourri and sachets, popular during the holidays, can be very dangerous. Exposure can cause skin or oral damage to your pet and may cause illness or death.

Food Hazards

Before you give in to those gorgeous, pleading eyes and feed your pet that leftover turkey leg or roast beef, be aware of the harmful and even deadly consequences of feeding "people" food to any companion animal.

One way to reduce this temptation is to feed your pet before guests arrive, so your pet will be less likely to beg and steal food.

Inform your guests of the house rules regarding your pet, such as not feeding him scraps from the table. Also, if your guests smoke, be extra vigilant and keep nicotine and alcohol out of your pet's reach. These can be highly toxic — even deadly!

Below are some foods that can be harmful to your pet on holidays and year-round:

- Rich, fatty foods, such as turkey skins or gravy can cause pancreatitis, an inflammation of a digestive gland, and can be very painful and serious, leading to hospitalization. Stomach upset, vomiting, and diarrhea can occur if pets consume these items. Limit table scraps, and let your guests know as well.
- Any kind of bone can tear or obstruct your pet's intestinal tract. Poultry bones can be especially dangerous or even fatal.
- Strings often used to tie the turkey during roasting can tie up your pet's insides, too.
- Found in abundance in turkey stuffing, onions are toxic and can destroy a dog's red blood cells, leading to anemia. Foods containing high amounts of onion powder should also be avoided.
- Grapes and raisins are beautiful to look at but harmful to pets. Keep that cornucopia filled with fresh fruits out of reach. Grapes especially contain toxins that can cause kidney failure.
- Chocolate — especially baking chocolate — can actually kill your dog, so keep all such goodies well out of reach. Chocolate can affect the nervous system and cause urinary system and heart muscle damage in your pet. Coffee is also dangerous to animals. Watch out for grounds and whole beans.
- Nicotine is a stimulant that can increase the heart rate leading to collapse, and in the worst case, even death.
- Alcoholic beverages should be kept away from animals year-round.
- Watch the string that ties up the turkey or roast, as well as the little red "pop-up" thermometers. Dogs and cats often eat these tasty things, causing intestinal blockage.

In addition, keep all leftover food out of reach in a closed container. Any garbage can contain toxins such as e-coli that can affect your pet's organs. This includes leftover tinfoil that, when chewed, can obstruct your pet's intestinal tract.

If you suspect your pet has gotten into a potentially poisonous substance, call your veterinarian immediately! Have the telephone number to your local emergency animal hospital readily available, as well as the number for the national animal poison control center.

Safe Ways to Celebrate

Make the Holidays Special for your Pet

Provide your pet some extra love and attention to let them know they're not forgotten during busy holiday times.

- Take your dog for an extra walk — it'll help both you and your pet relieve some of that holiday stress.
- Keep a supply of pet treats handy and reach for one before you're tempted to toss your pet that little bite of "people" food.
- Let your pet get into the gift-giving spirit by making a donation (e.g., food, litter, toys) to your local shelter in his name.
- Perhaps your dog would like a new bed, or your cat a new scratching post. Get creative!
- Enjoy some extra snuggle time.

Whichever treat or special activity you choose, you'll be enhancing the bond you share — and your pet will love it!

Stress

Holidays can bring stress to all of us, and pets are no exception. When routines are disrupted and new activities occur, your pet may be the first to notice. Follow these tips to make the holidays and other events more relaxing for everyone, including your companion animals.

- Animals can get stressed with the hustle and bustle of holiday guests. Therefore, it's best to simply keep your pets indoors and provide them with a safe, quiet, escape-proof room where they can get away from the energy and excitement.
- Holiday guests may not know your pets' routines. If your guests smoke, make sure they are careful with their cigarettes. Also, let them know in advance whether they are allowed to give treats to your animals.
- As your holiday visitors come and go there will be many escape opportunities for your pets. Make sure that your pets always wear current identification tags, consider having your pet's microchipped if you haven't already — and watch the door!

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Anchorage

Diamond Animal Hospital 2545 East Tudor Road **562-8384**

Pet Emergency Treatment 2320 E. Dowling Road **274-5636**

National Animal Poison Control

ASPC has resources for animal poison-related emergency, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. If you think that your pet may have ingested a potentially poisonous substance, call **(888) 426-4435**. A \$65 consultation fee may be applied to your credit card.

