

Tips for a Pet-Safe Holiday Season



As we kick off this season of lights, parties and yummy treats, the ASPCA wants to remind pet parents of potential hazards to companion animals. Here are some tips for making the holidays safe for your pet:

Foods to Avoid

Alcoholic beverages, coffee, onions, fatty foods, yeast dough, fruitcake and macadamia nuts can all lead to stomach upset, diarrhea or even worse—an inflammatory condition of the pancreas known as pancreatitis. A special no-no is chocolate, which if ingested can lead to death. And skip sharing the turkey—poultry bones can splinter and cause blockages.

Decorations Can Be Dangerous

Holiday decorations such as breakable ornaments, snow globes, string, ribbon and dreidels should be kept out of paws' reach. These traditional decorations can cause choking or severe intestinal problems if swallowed. Don't leave pets alone with wrapped gifts containing food. Holiday light strands, loose wires and electric cords can also pose serious dangers to your pet, especially puppies, who may chew on them.

When you leave the room, put the candles out! Animals can easily knock lit candles over, causing a fire, and curious cats are particularly at risk of getting burned by candle flames. Be sure to use appropriate candle holders, placed on stable surfaces.

Tinsel. Kitties love this sparkly, light-catching "toy" that's easy to bat around and carry in their mouths. But a nibble can lead to a swallow, which can lead to an obstructed digestive tract, severe vomiting, dehydration and possible surgery.

Be careful with holiday floral arrangements. Lilies are commonly used this time of year and all varieties can cause kidney failure in cats. Common Yuletide plants such as Christmas cactus and poinsettias can be potentially toxic to pets. Holly, when ingested, can cause pets to suffer nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Mistletoe can cause gastrointestinal upset and cardiovascular problems. Safe alternatives include artificial flowers made from silk or plastic.

Cats often see trees as fabulous climbing posts. Be sure to securely anchor your tree so it doesn't tip and fall. Don't let pets drink water from the holiday tree. Tree water may contain fertilizers that can cause stomach upset. Stagnant tree water can also act as a breeding ground for bacteria, and, if ingested, a pet may suffer nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Cover the water with a tree skirt, or better yet, buy a fake tree.

Put Medications Away

One of the most common holiday-related emergencies is the consumption of human pharmaceuticals. Make sure all your medications – including Ibuprofen, antibiotics, cough drops and eye drops - are securely locked away, and be sure to tell your guests to keep their meds zipped up and packed away, too.

Holiday Travel

Before traveling with your pets, make sure they have all the required vaccinations and are wearing identification tags and are micro chipped. If you're traveling by car, be sure to secure your pet safely with a seatbelt harness, crate or barrier and make frequent stops, allowing pets time to exercise and relieve themselves.

New Year's Noise

As you count down to the New Year, be alert to any pet hazards such as noise-makers and confetti. Noise-makers can frighten your pets, causing them to bolt out an open door or window. Confetti can wreak havoc on the digestive tract.

If your dog or cat accidentally ingests any potentially harmful products and you need emergency advice, please consult your veterinarian or contact the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center at (888) 426-4435 (a fee applies) or www.asPCA.org/apcc.

Information in this handout provided by the ASPCA. Copyright 2009 ASPCA, All Rights Reserved. For more information, visit www.asPCA.org.

