I have a mouse problem in my garage and was going to use d-CON to get rid of them. What precautions, if any, should I take since I have a dog and what are the signs if he eats some of it?

As you protect your home from outside pests, please keep in mind the safety of your pets. Many chemicals used to repel or kill common household pests can be toxic or lethal if pets are exposed to them.

One of the most common toxicities seen by veterinarians is anticoagulant rodenticide (mouse/rat poison) ingestion. These rodenticides are available in various forms and contain either a short-acting toxin like warfarin or a longer-acting toxin (diphacinone, brodifacoum, bromadiolone).

The poison works by keeping the rodent from using vitamin K, leading to inability of the liver to produce certain coagulation or clotting factors. The result after ingestion is a tendency for the mouse to bleed easily, which eventually leads to death. Unfortunately, this toxin can have the same effect on pets.

If you observe your pet ingesting rat poison, contact your veterinarian immediately. If ingestion has just occurred, your pet will not be bleeding. It takes at least one day for the clotting factors to be depleted enough for this to occur. Be sure to take the package of the poison with you so your veterinarian will know what it contains.

Your veterinarian may want to “decontaminate” your pet by inducing vomiting and giving activated charcoal to help absorb the remaining toxin in the stomach. Even after this process, however, it is possible that enough poison was absorbed to cause problems.

Your veterinarian will advise you on the best course of action and may consult the National Animal Poison Control Center (NAPCC) for advice.

Further action may include a variety of blood tests to evaluate the ability of your pet's blood to clot and possibly starting treatment with vitamin K. Since the toxin keeps the body from using its own vitamin K, giving a supplement at this point may hopefully keep coagulation problems from occurring.

Treatment could last a week to a month on average. Blood tests should be performed at the end of the treatment period to see if more supplementation is required.

On the other hand, if the pet is bleeding, either for no apparent reason or longer than expected after an injury, it is important to consider possible rodenticide toxicity.

If the bleeding is occurs inside the body, the only signs you may see are lack of energy and appetite, difficulty breathing, or observance of blood in the stool or vomit.

Various coagulation tests can determine the likelihood of a possible clotting problem in your dog. If rodenticide toxicity is thought to be the problem, vitamin K treatment is started immediately. However, it takes 12-24 hours for this treatment to be effective. In the meantime, your animal may continue to lose blood and could still suffer grave consequences.

Your veterinarian will usually suggest hospitalization of your pet during this critical period or may refer you to an emergency clinic. A plasma transfusion from a donor patient contains clotting factors, which can help stabilize your pet until the vitamin K takes effect. If a great deal of blood loss has already occurred, a whole blood transfusion may be necessary.

This type of toxicity can be very serious and life-threatening to your pet. If you use this type of rodent control around your house, you should be aware of the clinical signs associated with this poison.

The good news is that when ingested, if recognized and treated quickly, the pet's life can usually be saved. It is vital that you consult with your veterinarian if you think or know that your animal may have ingested this poison.

This column is provided by the faculty of the OSU Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital.

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