

In October we celebrate Halloween. What are some safety precautions pet owners should take during this time of year?

Chocolate poisoning poses a serious danger to dogs, especially at Halloween.

Many dogs are attracted to the smell and taste of chocolate. In general, the darker and more bitter the chocolate, the more toxic it can be.

The chemicals in chocolate that make it dangerous are methylxanthines, which are similar to caffeine.

Two to three ounces of Baker's chocolate can make a 50 lb. dog very sick. It can take up to 1 lb. of milk chocolate to cause toxicity in that same 50 lb. dog.

White chocolate rarely causes true chocolate poisoning because it contains lower amounts of methylxanthines; however, its high fat content may result in pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas).

If you think your dog may have ingested chocolate, call your veterinarian immediately. Untreated chocolate poisoning in dogs can result in vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, agitation, increased thirst, an elevated heart rate or seizures. These clinical signs usually occur within 6-12 hours of ingestion.

Other Halloween related hazards for cats or dogs are candy wrappers, raisins and candy overindulgence.

Ingestion of foil and cellophane wrappers can cause a life-threatening bowel obstruction, which may require surgical intervention. Watch for vomiting, decreased appetite, not defecating, straining to defecate, or lethargy.

Raisins represent a serious threat to dogs. Very small amounts of raisins (as well as grapes or currants) can cause kidney failure. Any ingestion of raisins or grapes should be treated as potentially toxic.

The toxin in raisins is more concentrated than in grapes. Although the exact toxic mechanism of action for grapes and raisins is unknown, any ingestion should warrant a call to your veterinarian right away. Clinical signs begin within 24 hours and include vomiting, nausea, decreased appetite, lethargy, abdominal pain and ultimately severe kidney failure may develop.

Pets can easily overeat and ingest large amounts of sugary, high-fat candy that can then lead to pancreatitis. This is a potentially fatal problem and one which results in severe abdominal pain.

Pancreatitis may not show up for one to four days after the pet ingests the candy. Signs include decreased appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, abdominal pain and possibly kidney failure or organ damage.

Halloween glow sticks, glow jewelry and costumes can also be dangerous to your pets. If a cat punctures or chews on glow sticks or glow jewelry, it is generally not life-threatening, but it can cause mouth pain and irritation, profuse drooling and foaming at the mouth.

If you dress your pets in costumes, make sure it doesn't impair vision, movement or air intake. If the costume has metallic beads, snaps or small pieces, be aware that some metals, especially zinc and lead, can result in serious poisoning if swallowed.

This Halloween season, keep your cats and dogs safe. Place chocolate, candy and other holiday trimmings out of reach. If your pet ingests something poisonous, always err on the side of caution and call your veterinarian immediately.

This column is provided by the faculty of the OSU Veterinary Hospital. The large volume of questions does not allow us to directly respond to specific email questions so please watch for your answer in the column. Email your questions for the column to dvmoncall@postoffice.cvhs.okstate.edu and watch for your answer.

###