



PETS

And the

HOLIDAY SEASON

The holiday season is a time of wonderful family celebrations but it can also be one of the most hazardous times of the year for pets.

TREATS AND FOOD

Holiday treats are meant for people, not pets. Fatty foods and sugary confections can rapidly become toxic to an animal unaccustomed to them. Of course, they also carry empty calories that can cause unhealthy weight gain.

Chocolate is probably the human food that is the *most dangerous* for animals – even one chocolate truffle could have serious consequences for a small pet. The theobromine in chocolate can cause vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity, irregular heartbeat, seizures and, in some cases, death. Never leave gifts of chocolate under the tree, in stockings or on tables easily accessible to pets.

LIVE TREES AND PLANTS

Tree needles can choke pets if ingested. Live plants – particularly, mistletoe and holly – are poisonous and can cause serious illness to pets (also small children). Keep plants out of their reach at all times.

DECORATIONS AND LIGHTS

Decorations, tinsel, candles and electrical wires can all become serious hazards if eaten, stepped on or chewed. Hang all decorations high up and secure them tightly using twine, not wire hooks that can fall off and become a hazard themselves. Shake the decorated tree vigorously to ensure it is pet-proof.

Tape all electrical wires to the floor or wall to avoid chewing or tripping. Like small children, pets can be attracted to flickering candles and fireplaces. Do not leave pets alone with live flames.

FRANTIC HOLIDAY, FRANTIC PET

The hustle and bustle of the holidays, unusual feeding and sleeping patterns, visitors, new noises, strong smells and other distractions can stress pets. Animals trying to cope may behave strangely and bite or growl without apparent provocation. This is their way of saying “I’m tired or frightened”.

Maintain the pets’ standard routine of exercise, regular food, quiet time, and playtime. If pets are shy or stressed, don’t force them to be part of the festivities, as that will only add to their discomfort.

Leaving pets alone for longer-than-normal time, or in an unfamiliar location, can also cause undue stress. If you are going to be away for some time arrange for a pet sitter. If your holiday plans will take you away for several days, consider placing your pet in a reputable boarding kennel that you have inspected earlier.

COLD WEATHER AND POISONS

Winter weather can be a hazard for pets. Make sure pets are dry, protected and in a safe environment. Just as temperature is an important consideration of pet health in summer, cold winters can prove equally dangerous. A fur coat is not enough to protect house pets from frostbite and hypothermia.

Other cold weather hazards include anti-freeze and road salt. Salt and chemicals can burn a pet's paws. Halite, the chemical salt that melts ice, is also poisonous. Be sure to wipe paws and noses with a damp cloth when returning indoors from a winter walk on salted streets.

Anti-freeze is highly toxic. Its sweet taste appeals to dogs and cats but doses as small as a teaspoon can kill an animal. Spilled anti-freeze should be cleaned from driveways to avoid even the smallest puddles that pets could lick.

THINK TWICE BEFORE GIVING A PET AS A PRESENT

While children often beg for a puppy or kitten at Christmas, the decision to bring a pet into the family should be made after serious consideration. A pet is a living creature that will look to you for its total health and welfare. If you are not able to make that complete commitment, wait.

Pets require time and financial resources for food, veterinary care, toys and options such as insurance. If you do decide to get a pet, look at a variety of sources such as the SPCA, that places rescued and rehabilitated animals into welcoming homes.

If you decide to purchase a pet from a breeder, don't inadvertently support the horrors of "puppy mills". Check out the breeder's credentials. Insist on seeing at least one of the parent animals and obtain health guarantees for the selected puppy or kitten. Usually, reputable breeders will ask potential clients many questions, because they want to ensure that their animals are well placed with responsible owners.

Finally, do your research and be certain that the pet you choose will be the one that fits with your lifestyle and needs.

We wish you and your family members, including the four-legged ones, a happy, healthy and safe holiday season.

B.C. Veterinary Medical Association

