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Winter holidays happier when pets are safe

Prevention of diseases that are avoidable is our message every day of the year. We explain it, emphasize it and repeat it. Using the right procedures and products for the right pet the right way enables us to help our patients prevent nasty diseases like fleas, heartworms, intestinal parasites, obesity, periodontitis and potentially fatal diseases like distemper, leptospirosis, feline leukemia and rabies.

The list of diseases grows quickly with mere moments of thought and the images of suffering witnessed in the past, both of the pet and of the heartbroken human owners shadow the list.

Putting extra emphasis on prevention may help all of us keep our holiday season full of celebrations and lower our risk for sadness. I have prepared a list of reminders from my experience for keeping your pets healthy, especially during the Christmas and New Year's holiday season. You might have some good advice for protecting pets from dangers, too, or some questions for ACVMA veterinarians

Medical/Surgical Illness

Pancreatitis -- Stress from daily routine change and/or diet change can lead to this painful disease that may involve vomiting, diarrhea and dehydration. "People food" is a major cause.

Foreign body obstruction -- Eating non-food items such as toy parts or bones.

Fractured teeth --- Painful trauma requiring costly oral surgery caused by chewing on hard items such as a bone or hard chew toy.

Food Dangers

Chocolate toxicity -- Caused by theobromine in the chocolate. Darker varieties have more theobromine. Depending on type and amount consumed. symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, heart arrhythmias, tremors, seizures and death.

Grapes and raisins -- Risk acute kidney failure and death in pets.

Decorations

Tinsel, strings, ribbons -- Intestinal obstruction and intestinal laceration risk.

Plants -- All parts, including the pollen of lilies (*Lilium* and *Hermerocallis* genera) may cause fatal acute kidney failure in cats. Mistletoe and holly can be fatal if enough is eaten by pets. Christmas rose, amaryllis and poinsettias cause vomiting and diarrhea when eaten.

Wrapped gifts of food or decorations with food -- Toxicity, foreign body obstruction, vomiting.

Candles/hot wax -- Singed whiskers, burns, house fires.

Electrical cords -- Chewing may result in disfiguring burns on mouth involving soft tissue and bone, pulmonary edema or death.

Healthy Holiday Tips

Avoid changing your pet's diet; do not feed "people foods," fatty foods or sugary food. Keep meals on routine schedule and of measured volume.

Do not give bones of any kind, ever.

Changes in household routine and human anxiety levels affect pets who may respond with uncharacteristic behavior, which includes chewing on items. Show your pets love by keeping their daily routine as unchanged as possible. Always include exercise in your pet's day.

Keep decorations, especially those with food items, inaccessible.

Label food gifts you give with "Keep away from pets!" on the tag.

Feed pets measured meals each day so you know if they are eating normally or not.

Before lodging your pets at a kennel or before accepting visiting pets into your home, make sure flea prevention is addressed safely and effectively.

Avoid "hit by car" accidents by keeping your pet secure and monitored while visitors come and go. Open doors are a dangerous hazard ... it happens every year.

Contact your veterinarian early about a problem. This may result in a simpler and less costly solution.