Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
www.vtvets.org

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Happy Howlidays: Keep Your Pets Safe This Season

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Nothing spoils holiday cheer like an emergency trip to the veterinary clinic, especially one that could have been prevented. A little planning around food, decorations, visitors, and travel can help keep your pets safe and your celebrations merry.

Keep Holiday Food Out of Reach

We love to treat our pets, but sharing holiday food can make them seriously ill. Chocolate is dangerous, and sweets and baked goods may contain xylitol, an artificial sweetener that can cause seizures, liver failure, and even death in dogs.

Keep rich table scraps—including gravy, sauces, dressing, and meat or poultry fat and skin—away from pets. These foods can cause digestive upset or painful pancreatitis. Bones can cause choking or intestinal blockage. Grapes, raisins, onions, and unbaked yeast dough should also stay out of reach.

Even a pet that has never counter surfed may be tempted by a holiday feast. Keep food secure and trash inaccessible: meat carcasses and other scraps can be irresistible.

Decorate with Pets in Mind

Holiday plants, lights, and decorations brighten our homes, but they can also tempt curious pets. Swallowed ornaments can cause illness or blockage. Tinsel, ribbons, and other stringy decorations can cause choking or intestinal blockage. Cats may also topple a Christmas tree while climbing it or playing with ornaments.

Keep pets away from tree-water additives, electric lights, candles, and oil lamps. Holiday plants that can cause trouble include poinsettias, amaryllis, mistletoe, balsam, pine, cedar, and holly. Liquid potpourri can contain essential oils that severely damage a pet's mouth, eyes, and skin.

For information about toxic plants to pets and the ASPCA's 24-hour poison hotline, visit www.aspca.org.

Give Pets a Quiet Retreat

If your pet is nervous around visitors, provide a quiet, safe place to escape the activity. Let guests know how to avoid accidentally letting your pet outside.

Make sure your pet wears identification so you can be reunited if they slip out. If your pet is not microchipped and you cannot arrange a veterinary visit before the holidays, write your phone number on their collar. A collar without contact information makes it much harder to find an animal's owner.

Plan Ahead for Travel and Boarding

Always secure pets in a harness or carrier clear of airbags and never leave them alone in a car in any weather. Loose pets can distract drivers, be thrown through the windshield in a crash, or escape through open doors or windows.

Before air or international travel, research requirements and ask your veterinarian whether your pet can travel safely; short-nosed dogs and cats may face greater risk. Bring food, medications, and medical records, and ensure your pet wears identification.

Before boarding your dog, discuss recommended vaccinations with your veterinarian. Kennel cough and flu vaccines take a couple of weeks to provide protection, so do not wait until the day before boarding.

For more pet-travel precautions, visit avma.org.

Keep Emergency Contacts Handy

A few common-sense precautions can help keep the holidays safe and happy for your pets. Because some things cannot be avoided, to be safe, keep your veterinarian's contact information handy, along with the ASPCA poison control number: (888) 426-4435.