

How do you know if your pet is sick:

Prevention is the medicine. Have your pet fully vaccinated every year; supervise your pet; and provide your pet with a proper diet and adequate exercise.

Even with all of the above, your pet may still get sick. While it can be difficult to know when to call the vet, here are a few guidelines in recognizing a sick pet:

- Diarrhea.
- Unexplained or sudden weight loss.
- Significant loss of appetite or increased appetite.
- Vomiting.
- Pawing at ears or shaking head.
- Lumps on body.
- Significant fur loss (not just shedding, which is normal); dull, patchy coat.
- Persistent sneezing or coughing.
- Abnormal discharge from the eyes or nose.
- Stiffness or weakness in any joints; pet moves with difficulty.
- Straining to urinate or defecate. Inability to urinate is an emergency - get your cat to the vet immediately.
- Injury.

Note: Keep the name and number of the closest emergency vet clinic (for after-hours pet care), as well as those of your regular vet, close by the telephone.

Pets and common household poisons:

Consult your vet immediately if you suspect your pet has ingested poison. Be prepared to provide as much information as you can, such as what type of poison it was, how much your pet ingested, and when it happened. Follow your vet's instructions carefully.

Common poisons include:

- Human medication, such as aspirin or Tylenol.
- Antifreeze (windshield wiper fluid). The taste appeals to dogs and cats - but a even a small amount can be fatal!
- Household cleansers - oven cleaners, floor cleansers, furniture polish, etc.
- Rat and mouse poisons.
- Gardening supplies - weed killers, insecticides, slug bait, etc.
- Paint and paint solvents.
- Plants, both indoor and outdoor.

Animal stings or bites, ie. snake, bee.

Emergency first aid for your pet:

Let me state without question, always consult with your veterinarian. No question is too trivial when it comes to keeping our pets safe and healthy.

Of course, prevention is what we need to strive for. Hopefully you will never have

to encounter any of these situations.

Here are a few of the more common situations that may arise. Treat them as best you can, and then call or visit your vet. Please remember that injured animals may be afraid and in pain, and they may bite. Please be careful!

- Cuts, bite marks, puncture wounds, etc. Gently clean the area with warm water.
- Heat stroke. Watch for symptoms like uncontrollable panting, collapse, a blank or "fixed" stare, or even unconsciousness. Move your pet to a cool, quiet area and offer him or her some water.
- Car accidents. Your pet is likely to be in shock; try to keep her quiet and warm, and try to stop any bleeding. Take your pet to the vet immediately - use a blanket or a board to get her there. Be very careful ... your gentle sweet pet may bite if she is frightened or hurting.
- Bee or wasp stings. If you can see the stinger, take it out. Then wrap the affected area in a cool damp cloth. Watch for severe reactions - most pets should recover fairly quickly, but call your vet if yours does not.
- Burns. Apply cold water to the affected area and call your vet.
- Poison. If you suspect your pet has been poisoned, call your vet immediately. Do NOT attempt to make your pet vomit. Your vet may be able to coach you over the phone, or may ask that you bring the pet to the clinic. Provide all the information you can. For example, if you know your pet has ingested a poison, tell the vet what it was, how much, and when it occurred.

Eye problems. If your pet is squinting and seems unable to open his eye, consult with your vet. The sooner, the better - eyes are a delicate organ and you don't want your beloved pet going blind or losing his eye!

Pet safety during the holidays:

Holidays are for sharing with loved ones ... and that includes your pets. Keep everyone safe and happy with the following tips:

Keep chocolate out of the way.

Many pets are attracted to the smell and taste of chocolate. But in sufficient quantities, chocolate can make your pet very sick! Chocolate can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and other ailments. Keep all chocolate stored somewhere that your pet cannot get to it (counters are not good places - I know in my own household, the cat could knock chocolate off the countertop and right into the path of my enthusiastic and hungry dogs!).

Be careful with tinsel.

Although tinsel is very pretty and is a common decoration on trees, your pet may swallow it. This can cause an intestinal blockage which could cause your pet an unwanted trip to the vet. Think about using other types of decorations on your tree instead.

Be aware of pets and guests.

Some pets may wander out of the door during the hustle and bustle of the holidays, where guests may be coming in and out the door. If you have pets that have a tendency to make a break for the outdoors, you may want to keep them in a room or a kennel if you have guests coming and going all day long. It doesn't sound like the nicest thing - but you'll be able to check on them once in a while and play with them, while feeling secure that they're okay. It won't be a very happy holiday if your beloved pet goes missing!

Tie extension cords out of the way.

With all the pretty lights during the holiday season, you probably have a variety of extension cords running every which way. Keep an eye on your pet to make sure they don't chew these cords (or they could be in for a real shock!), and where possible tie cords out of the way. Some hardware stores also sell a plastic tubing into which you insert cords to keep your gnawing little pet from hurting itself.

Pet safety tips for a happy Halloween:

Tonight all the ghosties and gremlins come creeping out to scare up a few treats. During this busy time, you can help keep your pet safe with these tips:

Keep your pet safely closed up in a room.

The ringing doorbell, shouting children, the noise and the constant activity can take its toll on your pet - especially timid or shy pets. In the excitement, pets may nip or bite someone or may run out the door.

There's also the unfortunate fact of life that there are people who do not respect life - particularly if it's 'just' a pet. Black cats in particular are prone to malicious acts on Hallowe'en.

Instead, provide your pet with a room of his or her own for the few hours that the trick-or-treaters are out. Put down a nice warm bed, water, maybe even a toy or two.

I know it can be tough to lock up your beloved pet when they always have the run of the house. But it's only for a few hours ... and it will keep them safe and prevent possible problems.

Likewise, don't take your dog trick-or-treating.

Hallowe'en is full of excited kids running about - and even a normally friendly and calm pet may nip someone. Better to keep pooch at home where he can spend the time snoozing on his favorite blanket or playing with a toy.

If you do take your dog out, be sure to keep him on a very short leash. This will allow you to retain maximum control; it will help you to prevent your dog from possibly fighting with other dogs, chasing children, or biting strangers.

Beware of feeding your pets Hallowe'en treats.

Candy is not suitable for your pet - and chocolate, in particular, is toxic. Chocolate can cause vomiting, restlessness, heart disturbances, and even death.

Keep candy out of your pet's reach and tell children not to share with the pet. If you suspect your pet may have consumed candy, contact your vet immediately.

Check your pet's cute little costume.

If you like to dress up your pet for Hallowe'en, be sure to carefully remove all elastics and other fasteners when removing his costume. These little objects can injure your pet by lodging in his skin, piercing a paw, sticking in a curious pet's throat (if he attempts to swallow the object), etc.

Hallowe'en is a great time for families to get out and enjoy themselves. Pets, however, enjoy routine and can get stressed when faced with changes. A few precautions now can save you heartache later.

Have a safe and happy Hallowe'en!