

Groundbreaking: New Category Added to Top Pet Toxins List

For the first time ever, this category of pet toxins has been added to the official ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center's annual list of top toxins. And it's about time, as a recent survey shows this category has become the most frequent cause of poisoning, especially for dogs.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- For the first time ever, recreational drugs such as marijuana, hallucinogenic mushrooms, and cocaine have been included on the list of top toxins for pets
- In the five years leading up to 2022, the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center saw a nearly 300% increase in calls for potential marijuana ingestion by pets
- Other items on the pet toxins list include human OTC and prescription medications, foods including chocolate, veterinary products, plants, and household toxins
- If you know or suspect your pet has ingested a toxin, immediately call your veterinarian, the nearest emergency animal hospital, or an animal poison control center

For the first time ever, recreational drugs have made it onto the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center's (APCC) annual list of top toxins for pets for 2022.¹ Coming in at number 10 of the top 10 are drugs including marijuana (in various formats), hallucinogenic mushrooms, and cocaine. Human over-the-counter medications, in particular pain medications such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen, retain in the top spot on the list for another year.

In 2022, the APCC assisted with over 278,000 calls in the U.S. for possible animal poisonings, which represents a nearly 5% increase over 2021. Almost 11% more of those calls were related to potential marijuana ingestion than in the previous year. Over the past five years, the center has seen a nearly 300% increase in calls.

Top 10 Pet Toxins of 2022

1. **Human over-the-counter medications** — Pain medications (**ibuprofen, acetaminophen**) are the most common

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) include Advil, Motrin, and Aleve. Pets are extremely sensitive to compounds in these medications and can become very ill from even a very small dose. Cats can suffer kidney and liver damage, and any pet that ingests NSAIDs can develop ulcers of the digestive tract. Symptoms of poisoning include digestive upset, vomiting, bloody stool, increased thirst, increased frequency of urination, staggering, and seizures.

Acetaminophen products include Tylenol, as well as certain formulations of Excedrin and several sinus and cold preparations. Cats are at particular risk from acetaminophen, as just two extra-strength tablets can be

fatal. If your dog ingests acetaminophen, permanent liver damage can be the result. And the higher the dose, the more likely that red blood cell damage will occur. Symptoms of acetaminophen poisoning are lethargy, trouble breathing, dark-colored urine, diarrhea, and vomiting.

2. **Food** — Examples include products containing the artificial sweetener **xylitol**, grapes/raisins, and protein bars (many contain xylitol and/or chocolate and/or raisins and/or nuts that are toxic for pets, especially dogs)

In recent years, reported cases of toxicity in pets not only in the U.S. but across the globe have most often involved the following food items:

- Chocolate and chocolate-based products
- Plants containing allium, including onions, leeks, and chives
- Macadamia nuts
- Vitis vinifera fruits, including grapes, raisins, sultanas, and currants
- Foods and product containing the sweetener xylitol
- Ethanol in alcoholic beverages

3. **Human prescription medications** — In addition to OTC medications like NSAIDs and acetaminophen, the Pet Poison Helpline lists several prescription medications as most often involved in pet poisonings, including:²

- Antidepressants
- ADD and ADHD drugs
- Benzodiazepines and sleep aids
- Birth control medications
- ACE inhibitors
- Beta-blockers
- Thyroid hormones
- Cholesterol lowering agents

4. **Chocolate** — Chocolate is toxic to both cats and dogs, and the darker the chocolate, the more toxic. It contains a caffeine-like stimulant substance that when ingested by your pet can cause vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity, racing pulse, and even seizures. Make sure all your family members and guests, including children, understand the importance of keeping chocolate away from your dog or cat.

5. **Plants** — The top 4 **outdoor plants toxic to pets** include the Sago palm, lilies, plants containing cardiac glycosides (e.g., dogbane, foxglove, milkweed, kalanchoe, lily of the valley, and oleander), and blue-green algae found in stagnant, warm water. Toxic indoor plants include:

- Spring flowers (e.g., daffodils, hyacinth, and tulips)
- Kalanchoe
- Plants from the Araceae family (e.g., philodendron, pothos, peace lily, calla lily, dumb cane, arrowhead vine, mother-in-law's tongue, sweetheart vine, devil's ivy, umbrella plant, and elephant ear)
- English shamrock, rhubarb (leaves), and tropical star fruit
- Corn plant/dragon tree

6. **Household toxins** — Most commercial cleaning products pollute the air inside your home by off-gassing toxic fumes that can be very hazardous, not to mention irritating, to everyone in the household. And the more cleaning you do, the greater the buildup of toxins in the indoor air. Common symptoms of irritation from cleaning product fumes include eye irritation and breathing problems.

If your dog licks the floor occasionally, he's ingesting small amounts of whatever floor cleaner you use. Your pets also walk around on the floor, lie on it, and lick their fur and paws, which is another way they can ingest cleaning chemicals.

Does your dog drink out of the toilet? Toilet bowl cleaners are among the most toxic for pets, especially the kind that clip to the edge of the toilet or sit in the tank, because their purpose is to deliver a constant level of chemicals to the toilet water. These caustic agents can burn your dog's mouth and throat, at a minimum.

Traditional cleaning agents can contain toxins such as bleach, ammonia, chlorine, phenol, isopropyl alcohol, and formaldehyde, all of which are potentially harmful to your pet. Symptoms of ingestion include vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, seizures, coma, and in severe cases, death. If your pet gets a caustic substance on his body, it can cause a rash or a burn on his skin.

Many popular cleaners these days also contain antibacterial substances that are not only unnecessary but can actually help bacteria mutate and become resistant to killing agents.

Other types of household toxins include rodenticides, chemical pesticides and insecticides, glues (Gorilla Glue®, as an example, can expand greatly once ingested and require surgical removal), ethylene glycol (antifreeze), and automotive products (e.g., windshield cleaner fluid or brake fluid).

7. **Veterinary products** — Prescription animal medications are often flavored to increase palatability, so pets may mistake them for treats and eat more than prescribed. Inquisitive pets may even eat pills that aren't flavored, so keep all medications (human and veterinary) out of your pet's reach.
8. **Rodenticides** — Common types include long-acting anticoagulants, bromethalin, hypercalcemic agents, and zinc phosphide. All types of rat bait are poisonous to pets, but bromethalin is especially deadly because it is fast-acting and currently there is no antidote. If you have rodents around your home, a nontoxic alternative to rodenticides are humane traps. To discourage mice, rats, and other pests, make sure your trash cans are inaccessible to them. To keep your pets safe, supervise them when they're outside and don't allow them to consume dead rodents.
9. **Insecticides** — Most insecticides used around homes and yards (typically those that come in a spray can) are basic irritants to dogs and cats, and result in clinical signs of drooling, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. However, there are some less common types that are mixed with dangerous chemicals such as organophosphates or carbamates that can be life-threatening to pets if consumed.

It's also important to realize that chemical **flea and tick preventives** can be toxic to pets as well. Fipronil, for example, is the insecticide found in Frontline, Sentry, Hartz and other flea/tick products, and has been classified as a possible human carcinogen. Spot-on flea/tick products for dogs top the list of poisonings involving cats according to the Pet Poison Helpline, while neurologic adverse events have been reported in both dogs and cats treated with flea/tick products containing **isoxazoline**, a chemical insecticide.

10. **Recreational drugs** — As noted earlier, this category of pet toxins primarily involves marijuana, cocaine, and hallucinogenic mushrooms, along with opioids. In a study published last year, researchers at the University of Guelph's Ontario Veterinary College conducted a survey of U.S. and Canadian veterinarians and found that

ingestion of cannabis edibles by unsupervised pets (primarily dogs) was the most frequent cause of poisoning.

It's important to realize that THC levels in cannabis are higher than ever before, so to protect your pet, keep all marijuana plants and products stored safely away, and when outdoors with your dog, stay alert for signs she's picked up something in her mouth. It's also important to note that CBD products for pets do not contain any notable levels of THC, so don't fear using CBD products that are specifically designed for pets.

If you know or suspect your pet has ingested a toxin of any kind, call your veterinarian, the nearest emergency animal hospital, the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center hotline at 888-426-4435, or the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661 immediately.

Sources and References

[AVMA News, June 20, 2023](#)

¹ [ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center Press Release, March 15, 2023](#)

² [dvm360 Client Handout: Top 10 Human Medications Poisonous to Pets](#)
