



PET PERILS IN A PILL BOTTLE
One Pet's Poison is Another Person's Medicine

Cats love to explore. They climb. They poke their noses into all sorts of places. Cats paw at things. They are curious, and they love to play with - and eat - everything they find.

Dogs are likewise active. They bounce around. They dig at things. They jump up on things. They explore in their own way. They put *everything* into their mouths. And, if it tastes good (well, even if it doesn't taste good – but if it tastes good at least to a dog), the dog will eat it.

Unfortunately, much of what pets get into can be extremely toxic and there can be many, and significant, consequences of pet poisonings. If medications are stored in an accessible place, a pet can (and will) quickly and easily consume them, whether they are intended for animal or human use.

It is reported that human medications – both prescription and over the counter – account for one-quarter to one-half of all calls to animal poison hotlines. Pets will quickly and easily ingest dropped pills, accidental or otherwise. Unknowingly, owners will offer human medications to their pets in well intentioned efforts to treat a real or perceived illness, or in attempts to alleviate pain or anxiety. Likewise, well intentioned pet owners can accidentally administer the wrong medication (or dose), and, pets have been known to easily chew their way through a pill bottle. All too often, unfortunately, an owner is confronted with a pet with a resulting illness, or, more tragically, even the death of the pet. Sadly, pet poisonings are common and can be very serious, but many can be prevented.

Taking medication prescribed for someone else puts one at risk of illness or even death – and this applies to pets, too. Many medications are used in both animals and people, but the dose, administration, and even the expected effects can be vastly different. Just as children should not be medicated like they are “little adults,” pets should not be medicated as if they are “four-legged children.” One of the most common factors in animal drug poisonings is the reckless administration of over the counter drugs by well-intentioned pet owners who do not first consult with a veterinarian.

Because animals (and cats in particular) do not have the same enzymes for metabolizing medications as people, they are unable to detoxify, and thereby eliminate, them as readily. Even medications which might seem to be very benign to humans may cause serious poisoning in a pet, and possibly even be fatal.

Medications with a very narrow margin of safety can have dire consequences if not dosed accurately. Medication dosing is not based just on animal size and age; it may also be determined by the species, or even the breed. A drug dose

PET POISON PILLS

Below is a list of human medications that are most commonly associated with pet poisonings. This is not an all-inclusive list of animal poisons – simply the most common. Treat all medications as if they could be potentially harmful to a pet.

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) (Advil, Aleve or naproxen, Motrin or ibuprofen)
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- Antidepressants (Effexor or venlafaxine, Cymbalta or duloxetine, Prozac, Lexapro)
- ADHD psychostimulants (Adderall, Concerta, Ritalin)
- Benzodiazepines and hypnotics (Xanax or alprazolam, Klonopin or clonazepam, Ambien or zolpidem, Lunesta)
- Oral contraceptives (estrogen, estradiol, progesterone)
- Angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors (Zestril, Altace)
- Beta blockers (Tenormin, Toprol, Coreg)
- Thyroid hormones (levothyroxine)
- Cholesterol lowering agents (statins) (Lipitor, Zocor, Crestor)
- Tramadol (Ultram)
- Salicylates (Aspirin)
- Local anesthetics (lidocaine, tetracaine, pramoxine)
- Vitamins and supplements

appropriate for a human is not necessarily suitable for an animal. Incorrect dosages will often result in overdosing and drug poisoning.

Pets, like children must be protected from getting into our medications. Unfortunately, medications come only in child-proof packaging, not pet-proof packaging. Follow some simple, common sense guidelines to help keep your pet safe from a medication poisoning:

- Keep medications away from pets until they are to be administered as specifically instructed by a veterinarian
- Do not leave medications sitting where a pet can get to them – on a counter top or a car seat, for example
- Keep pill bottles out of reach, too; a dog can chew into a pill bottle quicker than this sentence can be typed
- Never leave loose pills in a re-sealable plastic bag; they are much too easy to chew into
- Keep weekly pill containers away from pets; to a pet, they can appear to be a fun chew toy
- Store pet medications away from owner medications; they can be mixed up much too easily
- Keep carry bags away from pets; inquisitive animals will readily explore and empty them out
- Instruct house guests to keep medications securely out of reach of pets
- If you drop any medication, pick it up immediately
- Never give any medication to a pet without first consulting a veterinarian; this includes over the counter medications, medications intended for people, and medications intended for other pets
- Always contact a veterinarian if a pet has ingested a medication not prescribed by a veterinarian
- Keep the phone number for your veterinarian, the local animal emergency care center, and an animal prevention control center available at all times

If you suspect that a pet has been poisoned remain calm, but to act immediately. Every moment counts. Call your veterinarian, or if unavailable, the local emergency animal treatment center. Typically, evidence will be found, be it an empty container, a torn package, some pills that were not ingested, or even vomit. Even if uncertain of the amount, try to identify the substance to give your veterinarian a starting point for treatment. Collect and save any samples that might be useful, including vomit, stool, urine, and even the poison itself. Diagnosis and subsequent treatment will be dependent on the information that you are able to provide, the pet's behavior, a veterinarian examination, and test results.