Poison Ingestion Emergency Steps for Small Pets

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Steps to Take if You Suspect Your Small Pet Has Ingested Something Poisonous

You've tightened all the lids on your household cleaners. You've placed medications inside a high cupboard with a safety latch. You've made a First Aid Kit stocked with everything you think your small pet will need in an emergency. And then, it happens.

As you are rearranging some furniture, your elbow bumps your Syrian hamster's habitat and knocks it to the floor. Your first thoughts are about your precious pet's safety. But the habitat holds - except for its door, which drops open on its hinges. From the opening darts your hamster. You are a bit relieved to see he is fine. But as he squeezes between the slats on the grate covering the heating duct in your wall, you begin to second guess yourself. Just how safe have you made your house? And how safe is your pet, now on the loose somewhere within it?

Despite your best search efforts, it takes you a few hours to find your elusive hamster. When you finally do find him, he is huddled behind your entertainment center, wheezing above a small pile of what looks like leaves from your favorite houseplant. When you reach to pick up your pet, he shirks away from you, bounds a few steps, and then stops. Is that houseplant poisonous? Has your pet eaten something else? Is he going to be all right?

Even the best precautions in poison prevention can be thwarted by an innocent accident. If you suspect your pet has ingested something poisonous, remain calm, but seek immediate medical attention. Many local veterinarians remain on-call at all times. Your specific veterinarian is the best person to contact, as he/she is familiar with your pet and his history. To help ensure your pet receives adequate care, keep the following in mind:

The Animal Poison Control Center: Your Small Pet's Safety Net

In an emergency, pet owners can call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center. The ASPCA has the nation's only animal poison control center staffed by twenty-five veterinarians, including five board-certified veterinary toxicologists and ten certified veterinary technicians. Located in Urbana, Illinois, the specially trained staff offers assistance to pet owners and specific diagnostic and treatment recommendations to veterinarians pertaining to toxic chemicals and dangerous plants, products, or substances. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Center also offers extensive veterinary toxicology expert consulting on a wide array of subjects, including legal cases, formulation issues, product liability, and regulatory reporting. To reach the ASPCA, call:

- 1-888-4ANI-HELP (1-888-426-4435). With this number, the $65.00 charge is billed to a caller's credit card only.

Before you call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center:

- If you suspect that your pet has been exposed to a poison, it is important not to panic. While rapid response is important, panicking generally interferes with the process of helping your animal.

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- Take 30 to 60 seconds to safely collect and have at hand the material involved. This may be of great benefit to the Center professionals as they determine exactly what poison or poisons are involved. In the event that you need to take your animal to your local veterinarian, be sure to take with you any product container. Also bring any material your pet may have vomited or chewed, collected in a zip-lock bag.
- If your animal is having a seizure, losing consciousness, unconscious, or having difficulty breathing, take him to your veterinarian immediately.

When you call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, be ready to provide:

- Your name, address, and telephone number.
- The agent your animal(s) has been exposed to, if known.
- Information concerning the exposure (the amount of agent, the time since exposure, etc.). For various reasons, it is important to know exactly what poison the animal was exposed to.
- The species, breed, age, sex, weight, and number of animals involved.
- The problems your animal(s) is experiencing.
- If you are unable to access the 900 number, call your telephone company for assistance or use the 888 number. When the 888 number is used, your credit card number will likely be required in addition to the above information.

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