



Your pet's Christmas survival guide

A third of pet owners will experience a festive emergency – make sure your pet isn't one of them

An astounding third of pet owners will experience an emergency this festive season, and the UK's leading pet emergency service, [Vets Now](#) will see a 70% rise in cases¹ around Christmas and New Year as worried pet owners battle with the unexpected dangers of Christmas – with everything from accidental ingestion of raisins and tinsel to fairy light and candle burns.

With treats in abundance over Christmas, Vets Now received 206 calls about chocolate poisoning cases alone on Christmas Day and Boxing Day last year. That's more than four an hour.

And during the 2018 festive period almost 66,000 people sought help from Vets Now's [chocolate toxicity calculator](#) for dog owners to work out whether their dog has eaten a potentially toxic amount of chocolate – an increase of 179% more people than the Christmas before.

Across December 2018, emergency vets also treated 364 dogs who had eaten mince pies, up 102% on the previous year.

Vets Now emergency clinics and hospitals up and down the country are bracing themselves for the festive emergency season with additional vets and vet nurses on shift and stockpiling extra clinical supplies and medicine.



¹ *Results based on Vets Now's cases database from 2018 for the week of Christmas and New Year compared to the annual average.



Keep your pets safe this Christmas with the Vets Now survival guide

Here, Dave Leicester, Head of Clinical Intelligence at Vets Now and one of the UK's leading emergency vets, has pulled together a **Christmas survival guide** for your pets this festive season.

Don't let festive treats turn to treatment

As a nation of pet lovers we all want to make sure our cherished companions join in with family Christmas celebrations, but at such a busy time of year for families, it's easy to overlook the many hazards which can put them at risk of injury or illness.

We are encouraging pet owners not to let treats turn into treatment.

Dozens of human foods are dangerous for dogs, with the most common being **chocolate, macadamia nuts, grapes and raisins – so beware of mince pies, Christmas cake and Panetonne**. Others that could see you spending your Christmas in the pet emergency room include **xylitol (a common sugar substitute), alcohol, caffeine, onions, garlic, blue cheese and anything high in salt or fat** – so be careful with things like Christmas stuffing and gravy and artificially sweetened treats.

9 in 10 poisonings actually happen whilst the pet is in their own home², and a shocking 5.5m of dog owners unknowingly feed their pets these harmful foods at Christmas³. Don't ever feed these items to your pets, and make sure they're kept well out of reach where your pet could access these items unknowingly.

What other Christmas hazards should I be aware of?

Other non-food Christmas hazards for pets lurking in our festive homes include:

1. **Tinsel** and lametta – dogs eat tinsel like we eat spaghetti and cats find lametta fascinating and may eat it causing dangerous blockages in their intestines.
2. **Salt Dough Ornaments** – the mix of flour and salt with water can cause a potentially fatal salt toxicosis if ingested by your pet

² www.vets-now.com/petemergency

³ www.vets-now.com/petemergency



3. **Poinsettia, Mistletoe and Ivy** - these are all mildly toxic to both cats and dogs
4. **Lilies** - those from the Liliium or Hemerocallis species — are very dangerous for cats. Eating any quantity of any part of the plant, or even drinking water from a vase containing them can be potentially fatal
5. **Wrapping Paper** – while toxicity is low, eating a large amount of paper could cause an obstruction in the stomach
6. **Snow Globes** – imported versions can contain antifreeze, as little as one tablespoon can be fatal for a cat
7. **Candles** - they can burn paws and the curious noses of our furry friends, and fall over when brushed against
8. **Fairy Lights** – cats are curious and will try to chew on anything, including fairy lights that can burn them and wires which can electrocute them
9. **Batteries** – from gadgets or children’s toys can cause serious internal burns if swallowed by pets.
10. **Festive fireworks** - Fireworks are commonly used in the run up to New Year and lots of pets suffer from a fear of fireworks. You can prepare in advance to help them deal with the stress from fireworks. Read our handy guide [here](#).

How much is too much?

If your pet has eaten anything potentially harmful, like chocolate, grapes or raisins, you should call your vet for advice. Vets Now has developed a chocolate calculator on its website to help pet owners determine necessity to see a vet: www.vets-now.com/christmas

Is it OK to wait till the next day to go to the vet?

No, if your dog has ingested something potentially harmful such as chocolate, grapes or raisins they should contact an emergency vet as soon as possible, even if it’s lunchtime on Christmas Day or midnight on New Year’s Eve.

What will the treatment involve?

In most cases, the vet can give an injection to make your dog sick, but that is usually not possible with cats and other treatments will be required. Treatment should be done as soon as possible after the event, as making your pet sick becomes a less effective solution with each passing minute.



If this is done straight away, in many cases, it may reduce the need for a prolonged hospital stay, and other expensive treatments.

If the type of toxin is uncertain, or there is no antidote, we would treat the symptoms to maintain normal function of the organs until the toxin has been eliminated from the body.

Know your pet emergency plan

Many local vet practices choose to close over the Christmas period so it's essential you're aware of your local out-of-hours emergency vet.

- If the emergency is during working hours, call your vet to find out what arrangements they have in place for you and your pet.
- If the emergency is out of hours, such as at night, on the weekends or bank holidays, contact your nearest Vets Now pet emergency clinic or Vets Now 24/7 hospital straight away.

Make sure everyone in the family has this number stored in their phone. Vets Now has 58 out-of-hours pet emergency clinics and three 24/7 hospitals across the country, so there should be one close to you.

When calling, try to have a note of the toxin's name, strength and the amount your pet has ingested or been exposed to. It would also be handy to give the vet your pet's approximate weight so the vet emergency team can be as prepared as possible to receive you.

Is it safe to give other Christmas treats to pets?

Chocolate, macadamia nuts, grapes and raisins (which includes mince pies, Christmas cake and Christmas pudding) should never be offered to dogs.

However, it doesn't mean you can't treat your dog at all at Christmas – there's plenty of treats out there which are specially designed for pets. Just remember not to over-indulge them!

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Vets Now notes to editor:

- Vets Now was established in 2001 and is the leading provider of emergency veterinary care for companion animals in the UK.
- With 24/7 Pet Emergency Hospitals in Glasgow, Manchester and Swindon, and 58 out-of-hours clinics nationwide, Vets Now is committed to delivering a responsive emergency and critical care service for cats, dogs and other small animals.
- Vets Now also partners with more than 1,400 veterinary practices across the UK to provide their clients with a seamless out-of-hours emergency care service.
- Vets Now employs over 1000 staff.
- Vets Now remains at the forefront of emergency veterinary care through its commitment to clinical excellence and training, employing many of the country's top Emergency & Critical Care