



Pet proof your Christmas

Our homes harbour a multitude of hazards for our pets at Christmas time and with us all spending more time at home than ever before this year, pet owners are being urged to be on higher alert.

According to the latest figures over half (51%) of UK adults own a pet, with over 20 million pet cats and pet dogs, meaning many homes across the country will need to factor four legged friends into festive plans. And with lockdown inspiring a huge rise in demand for puppies and kittens, for many households, this Christmas may be the very first as pet owners.

The UK's leading emergency vets, Vets Now, normally sees around a 70% rise in cases around Christmas and New Year as worried pet owners battle with the unexpected dangers of Christmas – with everything from accidental ingestion of raisins, chocolate, and tinsel to fairy light and candle burns. The team also normally see a 200% rise in people visiting their [chocolate toxicity calculator](#) during the festive period compared to the rest of the year.

Vets Now emergency clinics and hospitals up and down the country are bracing themselves for the festive emergency season.

To help pet proof your Christmas, the experts at Vets Now (www.vets-now.com) have shared their guide to the top festive watch outs, from food & drink to decorations and presents, to make sure your pets have a very merry, emergency-free, December...

Expert advice from Dave Leicester, head of telehealth, who looks after a team of experienced vets at Vets Now's Video Vet service.

FOOD & DRINK

Chocolate

Danger: Chocolate contains a stimulant called theobromine, a bit like caffeine, that is poisonous to dogs and severely poisonous to cats.

How to avoid: Never put chocolate treats, or presents that may contain chocolate, on or under your tree.

Dogs & cats: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 5/5

Christmas pudding and mince pies

Danger: All grapes, raisins, currants, and sultanas, as well as foods that contain them, are toxic to cats and dogs.

How to avoid: Keep well out of reach and carefully dispose of leftovers.

Dogs: Risk rating 5/5; Likelihood rating 5/5

Cats: Risk rating 3/5; Likelihood rating 1/5

Macadamia nuts



Danger: Can cause weakness, tremors, vomiting and hyperthermia within 12 hours of ingestion. Best to apply caution and avoid giving to cats.

How to avoid: Keep locked away in a cupboard and never leave lying around.

Dogs & cats: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 3/5

Onions

Danger: Onions contain an ingredient called thiosulphate which is toxic and can cause stomach irritation and lead to anaemia.

How to avoid: All forms of onion can be a problem, even if an ingredient in stuffing or gravy, so make sure all leftovers are properly disposed of.

Dogs: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 4/5

Cats: Risk rating 5/5; Likelihood rating 4/5

Alcohol

Dogs - Danger: Alcohol is significantly more toxic to dogs than to humans and may cause vomiting, diarrhea, difficulty breathing, tremors, coma and even death.

Cats - Danger: Can cause severe liver and brain damage. As little as a tablespoon can lead to problems for your cat and possibly even death.

How to avoid: Clean up spillages as they happen and never leave leftover drinks lying around.

Dogs & cats: Risk rating 3/5; Likelihood rating 2/5

Artificial sweeteners

Danger: One sweetener in particular, xylitol, is found in many foods, including some cakes. Ingestion can lead to potentially fatal hypoglycemia, acute liver disease and blood clotting.

How to avoid: Even tiny amounts can be extremely dangerous so avoid at all costs.

Dogs & cats: Risk rating 5/5; Likelihood rating 4/5

Blue cheese (Dogs)

Danger: Seen by many as a festive treat, blue cheese is at its best around Christmas because that's when it's made with the last of the rich summer milk. Most contain a substance called roquefortine C, which dogs are sensitive to.

How to avoid: Keep well out of reach and dispose of leftovers.

Dogs: Risk rating 1/5; Likelihood rating 2/5

Cooked bones

Danger: Once cooked, all bones become brittle and splinter easily which can pierce your pet's digestive tract or cause an obstruction.

How to avoid: When preparing Christmas dinner, ensure all meat is kept on the kitchen surface and dispose of leftover carcasses in the outside bin.

Dogs & cats: Risk rating 3/5; Likelihood rating 4/5

Mouldy foods

Danger: Mouldy dried dog and cat food and mouldy human food, particularly dairy products, bread and nuts, contain lots of toxins that may make your pet ill



How to avoid: Make sure your food recycling bin is well sealed or keep outside
Dogs & cats: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 3/5

DECORATIONS

Christmas trees

Danger: Pets and Christmas trees don't mix. Pine needles can cause mild stomach upset, cuts to the paws and mouth and, in severe cases, even perforation of the intestines. For cats and puppies, trees can also be a huge temptation as a plaything.

How to avoid: Vacuum daily, keep trees watered, use a strong base to hold it up, avoid shiny ornaments and attach those you do hang firmly. Or buy an artificial tree. It's worth considering keeping cats out of rooms with Christmas trees.

Dogs & cats: Risk rating 2/5; Likelihood rating 1/5

Glass baubles

Danger: These tend to smash into shards when eaten, causing irritation, perforation, or blockages.

How to avoid: Opt for shatter-proof baubles or decorations made of pet-friendly materials.

Dogs & cats: Risk rating 5/5; Likelihood rating 1/5

Tinsel

Danger: Dogs eat tinsel like we eat spaghetti, whilst cats love tinsel, but tinsel doesn't love cats. It can cause blockages or, even worse, work its way through the gut and into the intestine, which can be extremely serious.

How to avoid: Use pet-friendly alternative decorations

Dogs: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 2/5

Cats: Risk rating 5/5; Likelihood rating 4/5

Fairy lights

Danger: Some dogs will try to eat anything, including fairy lights. Cats are curious and some will try to chew on anything. These may cause electric shock if chewed.

How to avoid: Use an extension cord that shuts off automatically when damaged and tape all loose wires to the floor.

Dogs: Risk rating 3/5; Likelihood rating 1/5

Cats: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 1/5

Dogs –

Salt dough ornaments

Danger: Made by mixing flour and salt with water, these can cause potentially fatal salt toxicosis.

Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhoea, and seizures.

How to avoid: Hang them high and well out of reach or avoid.

Dogs: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 2/5

Cats –

Snow globes



Danger: Imported versions can contain antifreeze, otherwise known as ethylene glycol, as little as one tablespoon can be fatal for a cat.

How to avoid: Check the contents carefully and don't buy if unsure.

Cats: Risk rating 1/5; Likelihood rating 1/5

Candles

Danger: Candle sales have exploded in recent years, particularly at Christmas. They burn paws and curious noses and fall over when brushed against.

How to avoid: Keep them out of cat-range and put them out when you leave the room.

Cats: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 2/5

PRESENTS

Toys

Danger: Some dogs and cats will chew on and swallow anything that looks appealing, including children's toys, even if it's likely to put them at risk.

How to avoid: Monitor the opening of gifts and keep new toys out of reach.

Dogs & cats: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 4/5

Batteries

Danger: Ingestion of batteries is more common at Christmas and can cause chemical burns and heavy metal poisoning.

How to avoid: Never leave batteries, or small toys including batteries, lying around.

Dogs: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 1/5

Cats: Risk rating 4/5; Likelihood rating 3/5

Wrapping or crepe paper

Danger: While toxicity is low, eating a large amount of paper may cause an obstruction in the stomach.

How to avoid: Don't leave wrapped gifts lying around and dispose of old paper in an outside bin.

Dogs and cats: Risk rating 1/5; Likelihood rating 1/5

Silica gel

Danger: Commonly found in packaging and typically non-toxic, these can cause blockages in the gut.

How to avoid: Monitor the opening of gifts that may contain these sachets and dispose of carefully.

Dogs & cats: Risk rating 1/5; Likelihood rating 2/5

All of Vets Now's out-of-hours clinics and 24/7 hospitals have a vet and vet nurse on-site at all times.

www.vets-now.com. Video Vets Now offer an [online video consultation service](#), where you can video chat with a vet within minutes.

-ends-

Risk rating explained...

- 1 - Monitor your dog carefully and if you suspect a change in condition seek advice from your vet or, out of hours emergency vets.



- 2 to 3 - If you suspect your cat or dog has consumed any of the items listed seek urgent advice from your vet or, out of hours service.
- 4 to 5 - Contact your vet immediately or, out of hours, call your nearest Vets Now pet emergency clinic or Vets Now 24/7 hospital as your pet may require urgent emergency treatment

If you're unsure whether your pet needs veterinary treatment, you can book an online video consultation with [Video Vets Now](#).

ENDS

And note to JPI Eds, you can also have the content laid out like the below if you'd prefer.

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

Here, Dave Leicester, head of telehealth 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 home¹, and a shocking 5.5m of dog owners unknowingly feed their pets these harmful foods at Christmas². 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
3. **Poinsettia, Mistletoe and Ivy** - these are all mildly toxic to both cats and dogs

¹ www.vets-now.com/petemergency

² www.vets-now.com/petemergency



4. **Lilies** - those from the Liliaceae 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?

Your vet will check your dog over by performing a clinical examination and also ask you questions to see what you have observed at home. They may also need to perform blood tests, urine tests, x-rays or an ultrasound to work out what is going on.

Treatment will depend on the diagnosis but may include intravenous fluids — a drip — to correct dehydration, antibiotics if an infection is suspected, anti-vomiting medication and stomach protectants. If your vet believes the sickness is being caused by a foreign body, it’s likely surgery will be required.

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.

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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!