



PET TALK

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American College of Veterinary Pharmacists

PET OWNERS: BEWARE OF MOLDY FOODS!

In December, 2005, over 1,000,000 pounds of pet food (dog & cat) manufactured in a South Carolina plant were recalled due to the discovery of mold and mold toxin contamination of the corn-based foods. The potentially affected products had already been distributed in 23 states and overseas prior to the recall. Sadly, over 100 dogs have died and numerous others became sick after eating the food. Federal regulators cited improper testing or failure to test corn shipments as the cause, and the company has subsequently changed its testing policy to help prevent future problems with aflatoxin contamination. Now, many pet owners have questions about pet food safety and proper storage and handling. This fact sheet answers frequently asked questions from pet owners pertaining to aflatoxin contamination of pet foods.

What are aflatoxins? They are toxic chemicals produced by fungi/molds that are naturally present in the environment. These molds are capable of growing on crops such as corn, cottonseed, peanuts, rice, wheat, soybeans, almonds, walnuts, and coconuts, among others—especially during periods of drought or very high temperatures when crops are stressed. Harvested products may also be contaminated during periods

of storage under moist, warm conditions.

How do pet food companies prevent aflatoxin contamination? All corn and corn products are tested for aflatoxin contamination prior to use in the manufacture of commercial pet food. The products are tested once again by the manufacturer prior to use. In this incident of contamination, the food was improperly tested by the company.

Are commercial pet foods often contaminated with mold? No, this particular incident is viewed as an isolated case, and the company has since changed their testing procedures to prevent future problems. Since 1975, there have been 11 other documented episodes of aflatoxin contamination in commercial dog foods.

What are the signs of aflatoxicosis in dogs? Dogs that have eaten moldy food usually appear depressed, lethargic or weak. Loss of appetite and continuing vomiting are common. The “whites” of their eyes and other mucous membranes will likely develop a yellowish tint.

What should I do if I suspect my dog has consumed moldy food? Seek a veterinarian’s care right away! Early, aggressive treatment increases the chances of survival. Save a sample of the suspect food along with the

packaging information, including the product and date code.

What is the treatment for aflatoxicosis? There is no antidote for the aflatoxin; therefore, treatment is mainly aimed at decreasing liver stress, and providing supportive care and symptomatic management. Note: The liver is the main organ affected by aflatoxins. In addition to other supportive drug therapy and care, there are several drugs, nutraceuticals, and vitamins that the veterinarian can use to help the liver recover from damage. Some choices include S-adenosylmethionine (also called SAM-E), milk thistle, melatonin, ursodiol, colchicine, n-acetylcysteine, L-carnitine, and vitamin K.

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What are my dog's chances of survival from aflatoxicosis?

Unfortunately, even with aggressive treatment, dogs with aflatoxicosis have approximately only a 50% chance of survival. As might be expected, those dogs in better health and physical condition prior to intoxication tend to have better

outcomes than those in poorer health.

How can I protect my dog from contaminated foods? Most dogs are relatively indiscriminate in their eating patterns, and spoiled or moldy foods are just fine to their tastes. Examine all foods prior to feeding.

Do not feed products that look or smell moldy or rotten. Make sure trash bins are secure, since they may contain moldy bread or other contaminated foods. Store dog food in a cool dry place. If the food is transferred into a separate container for storage, be sure to keep the date code and product code from the original package.

TEN TIPS FOR A POISON-SAFE HOUSEHOLD*

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Be aware of the plants you have in your house and in your yard, if your cat is permitted outside. The ingestion of azalea, oleander, easter lily, or yew plant material by a cat could be fatal.2. When cleaning your house, never allow your cat access to the area where cleaning agents are used or stored. Cleaning agents have a variety of properties; from those that could just irritate the gastrointestinal tract to those that have a corrosive action and can chemically burn the sensitive mucous membranes of the mouth, esophagus, and stomach.3. When using rat or mouse baits, ant or roach traps, or snail and slug baits, place the products in areas that are inaccessible to your cats. Most baits contain sweet smelling inert ingredients, which can be very attractive to your cat.4. Never give your cat any medications unless under the directions of a veterinarian. Many medications that are used safely in humans can be deadly when used inappropriately. One extra strength acetaminophen tablet (500mg) can kill a 7 pound cat.5. Keep all prescription and over the counter drugs out of reach of your cats. Pain killers, cold | <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Never leave chocolates unattended. Approximately one half ounce of baking chocolate per pound body weight or less can cause clinical signs of toxicity.7. Many common household items have been shown to be lethal in certain species, including felines. Miscellaneous items that are highly toxic even in low quantities include pennies (high concentration of zinc), mothballs (contain naphthalene or para-dichlorobenzene - one or two balls can be life threatening in most species), potpourri oils, fabric softener sheets, automatic dish detergents (contain cationic detergents which could cause corrosive lesions), batteries (contain acids or alkali which can also cause corrosive lesions), homemade play dough (contains high quantity of salt), winter heat source agents like hand or foot warmers (contain high levels of iron), cigarettes, coffee grounds, and alcoholic drinks. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">8. All automotive products such as oil, gasoline, and antifreeze should be stored in areas away from cat access. As little as one teaspoon of antifreeze (ethylene glycol) can be deadly in a 7 lb. cat.9. Before buying or using flea products on your cat or in your household, contact your veterinarian to discuss what types of flea products she/he would recommend for your pet. Read ALL information before using a product on your cat or in your home. Always follow label instructions. When a product is labeled "for use in dogs only" this means that the product should NEVER be applied to cats. When using a fogger or a house spray, make sure to remove all cats from the area for the time period specified on the container.10. When treating your lawn or garden with fertilizers, herbicides, or insecticides, always keep your cats away from the area until the area dries completely. Discuss usage of products with the manufacturer of the products to be used. Always store such products in an area that will ensure no cat exposure. |
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** As reported by The Cat Fanciers' Association*