

Protecting Your Pet from Pesticides¹

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This guide explains precautionary measures that can be used to protect pets from injury due to pesticides used in and around the home.

Pets are an integral part of our families. They provide us with constant, loyal companionship and friendship, and in turn, they rely on us for care and protection. Some pesticide products used in and around the home can harm our pets if not used and stored correctly. Most pets are curious by nature; rodenticide bait stations carelessly placed around the homestead or sprays that have not been allowed to properly dry before reentry are potential accidents waiting to happen.

Pesticides can be absorbed into your pet's bloodstream through their mucous membranes, such as their eyes, nose, and mouth. Depending on the pesticide, some dry spray residues can cause injury when your pet chews on treated chew toys or ingests treated plants. If shortly after applying a pesticide, your pet shows lethargy, increased salivation, tremors, or convulsions, call your veterinarian immediately and have the suspected product's label on hand.

Pesticide labels contain precautionary statement sections and have specific directions concerning hazards to humans and domestic animals. Check this section of the label before making the pesticide application. The label will provide information on:

- How to use the product safely and effectively
- How to store the product safely
- First aid instructions
- Phone numbers to call for help or additional information

The best way to protect your pet when using pesticides is to use as much caution as possible. Prior to making an application, remove bedding, chew toys, and feed and water dishes that are in the intended area and keep the area well ventilated. Some products will have label statements regarding the length of time that the treated area should remain clear of people and pets. Statements regarding covering aquaria may also be present.

Pet Spot-On Products

Due to a significant increase in adverse incidents, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has taken a series of actions to increase the safety of spot-on pesticide products for flea and tick control for cats and dogs. EPA determines which product labels need stronger and clearer labeling statements. In 2010, EPA developed more stringent testing and evaluation requirements for both existing and new products. It's expected these steps will help prevent adverse reactions that can include skin effects (irritation, redness), gastrointestinal problems (vomiting, diarrhea), or effects to the nervous system (trembling, appearing depressed, seizures) from pet spot-on products. Following the 2008 increase in incident reports (up 50 percent from

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Use pesticides safely. Read and follow directions on the manufacturer's label.

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roughly 28,000 in 2007 to 42,000 in 2008), EPA received additional information from the pet spot-on pesticide registrants, Health Canada, and the Food and Drug Administration and began an intensive evaluation of these products. Among actions that EPA has taken are:

- Requiring manufacturers of spot-on pesticide products to improve labeling and make instructions clearer to prevent product misuse.
- Requiring more precise label instructions to ensure proper dosage per pet weight.
- Requiring clear markings to differentiate between dog and cat products and disallowing similar brand names for dog and cat products; similar names may have led to misuse.
- Requiring additional changes for specific products, as needed, based on product-specific evaluations.
- When new products are registered, granting only conditional, time-limited registrations to allow for postmarket product surveillance; if there are incidents of concern associated with the product, EPA will take appropriate regulatory action.
- Restricting the use of certain inert ingredients that EPA finds may contribute to the incidents.

In addition, to improve the regulatory oversight of pet products, EPA will require more standardized postmarket surveillance reporting on adverse effects, require submission of more sales information so that EPA can better evaluate incident rates, and bring up-to-date the scientific data requirements on pre- and postmarket testing so they are more in line with the Food and Drug Administration's requirements. Flea and tick products can be appropriate treatments for protecting pets and public health because fleas and ticks can transmit disease to animals and humans.

Label directions should be followed carefully and pets monitored for any signs of an adverse reaction after application, particularly when using these products for the first time. Negative reactions in dogs and cats can include drooling, burns, tremors, seizures, or even death. EPA recommends that pet owners consult a veterinarian about the best way to protect their pets from fleas and ticks and whether pesticides are needed, especially before using any product on weak, aged, medicated, sick, pregnant or nursing pets, or on pets that have previously shown signs of sensitivity to pesticide products.

Rodenticides

One of the most widely used types of rodenticide in and around indoor dwellings has been the anticoagulant products, such as warfarin. Generally, warfarin products contain relatively low percentages of active ingredient, and a one-time ingestion by a small domestic animal would unlikely cause toxic effects. Since there is usually a three-day delay before the onset of clinical signs from the effects of anticoagulants, pet owners are allowed time to discover exposure evidence and seek veterinary care. Some of the newer rodenticides are just as, if not more, toxic than the traditional warfarin products, so caution must be taken in placement and service.

Pesticides in the Aquarium

There are hundreds of products registered with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for use in home aquariums and ornamental fish ponds. Although these products may not be considered by many to be pesticides, they are registered as such with the EPA and State of Florida. Chlorinating solutions, bactericides, algicides, and various disinfectants are commonly available for use in and around the home. Check their product labels carefully for precautionary statements regarding pets and other domestic animals.

Products and Their Containers

The rule of thumb is to keep all products in their original containers. Also keep in mind:

- It is very dangerous to put products in food and beverage containers.
- Containers without tight-fitting lids can easily spill, allowing your pet access to the product.
- If you throw away the original container, you throw away important information needed in case of an emergency.
- If the label tells you to mix a product in another container, use all of the mixture. If you can't use all the mixture, label the new container for use in the future.

Keep Pets Away from Products

- Don't spray or store cleaning or pesticide products near pet food or water dishes.
- Make sure animals don't have access to bait products while they are in use.
- In the event of a spill, be sure to keep animals out of the area until it is cleaned up.

- Spraying outdoor products on a windy day can cause off-site movement of pesticides to water sources used by wildlife.
- Store all pesticides and household cleaners where pets can't access them.

Where to Get Help

- Most labels have a phone number listed on them for emergency purposes. In many cases, their phones are staffed 24 hours a day.
- Keep your local poison control center phone number near the phone.
- Keep your veterinarian's phone number near the phone.
- In the event of an emergency and when making a phone call, have the pesticide product's label in hand. The label provides those helping you with important information about the product.

Summary

Pets are our companions and deserve our care. Pesticide products can help alleviate pest problems in and around the home, but every pet's caretaker needs to take precautions.

Additional Information

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