

Holiday Safety – New Year's to Christmas

By Karen Peak

West Wind Dog Training

Holidays can be a time of great joy for the family but also disaster for your pet. Pretty lights, plants, food, guests, candy, and costumes – all can spell danger for your furry companion. Though we may get caught up in the festivities of the various holiday seasons, we must stop and consider our pets. Take a moment to plan for issues and make every holiday safe and sane for all. Let us take a bit and look at the major Holidays and what to look out for. I will start with the beginning of the year and work to the end.

NEW YEAR'S

Parties, champagne, streamers, food... Sounds like fun for a human. However, alcohol can be deadly for your pet in far less amounts than for you. Uncle Al's habit of getting the dog drunk every New Year's is a very bad thing. Parties in your house can be very stressing for a pet. Make sure he is safely in another room with a radio on softly and with plenty of toys. Check on him occasionally to make sure he is OK. Plastic streamers and decorations if ingested can cause intestinal damage. Gorging on food can lead to stomach upsets or even bloat. Keep the wild party for you and let your dog rest!

EASTER

Cute bunnies and chicks, all that chocolate and plastic grass abound. Chocolate can kill dogs. Theobromine is the substance in chocolate that is toxic. The darker the chocolate, the more toxic it is. The smaller the dog, the less it takes for a toxic affect. Other candies can cause stomach upsets, vomiting and diarrhea. Plastic grass can cause intestinal damage. Keep all Easter baskets out of your dog's reach. In addition, if your family does Easter egg hunts – use plastic eggs. Hardboiled eggs will go rancid when left out of the refrigerator. Should your dog find one not discovered by the kids, he could get a nasty tummy ache.

FOURTH OF JULY

Fireworks can be a very terrifying experience for dogs. The sounds can hurt their ears. The crowds at local events can also be distressing. Keep your dog safely inside during fireworks. Should he have a real problem and get panicky with the noise of firecrackers and things set off in your neighborhood, ask your vet about calming remedies or consult a behaviorist about starting to desensitize your dog. The combination of medication (traditional or holistic) as well as behavioral therapy can make future Fourths far more pleasurable for all. Never leave your dog in the back yard. He could panic and scale even a tall fence. Every year, vets are deluged with dogs that panicked and ran off only to be injured. Also, if you keep fireworks in your house, make sure the dog does not get at them. He could get very ill or worse.

HALLOWEEN

Costumes and candy, critters and monsters and dozens of kids coming to your door can spell disaster. Halloween can be one of the worst holidays. There is usually a plethora of chocolate that can make your dog very ill or worse. Masks and costumes can be quite scary to a dog that is not socialized to odd things. The constant opening and closing of the door give a great opportunity for escape. Goblins looking for mischief often seek out dogs left unattended outside for nasty pranks. Keep your dog away from all candy. When giving out candy, keep your dog in a back room or if you have a storm door, remove the top panel and pass candy through the opening. Never leave your dog outside unattended (and bring your cat in before dark). Some things freaks will do to pets are terrifying.

THANKSGIVING

Hoads of guests and huge amounts of food and your dog... this is a potential recipe for trouble. Even if your guests and the dog get along great, ask that they do not feed your dog table scraps. Onions can be toxic in varying amounts as well as varying types. Too much food can cause tummy troubles. If a dog gorges and then gets active, he can twist his stomach or intestine – this can be fatal if not caught immediately. If you have small children that visit, you must watch them and the dog. All it would take is one tugged ear and the dog may nip. This can cause family disputes. Keep pup safely tucked away until things calm down.

CHRISTMAS

Trees and plants, lights and balls, wrappings and ribbons, food and festivities – after reading the other holidays you can probably come up with dozens of potential troubles here! Mistletoe and holly berries can be deadly. Gorging on food is not good for the tummy and could lead to bloat. Wrappings and ribbons can cause intestinal damage if eaten. Batteries left out from assembling toys and small toy parts can be a temptation. Garland, balls, lights and tinsel on the tree can be hazardous.

Please remember your pet in your Holiday planning – no matter what the holiday. There is nothing worse than ending a festive evening with an emergency run to the vet!