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CVMA Reminds Pet Owners to Decorate and Celebrate Using Pet-Safe Practices *Pets and favorite traditions can coexist this holiday season with awareness, attentiveness*

The end of the year is a busy time for many people as they prepare to enjoy a fun and memorable holiday season. The Chicago Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) wants to remind pet owners that decorating homes, preparing food and hosting events requires more pre-planning and knowledge of how to keep their dogs and cats safe and minimize stressors during this festive season.

“It’s common for home holiday decorations to start appearing around Thanksgiving,” said Dr. Kirsten Plomin, CVMA Board President. “Although many pet owners may be aware of the toxic nature of certain foods for pets, not everyone thinks about the non-edible dangers that are present, particularly around holiday time.”

- Candles, which are used in many holiday celebrations, can be dangerous to pets. Not only can paws or tails be burned, but a startled cat or dog could knock over lit candles and start a fire.
- Christmas trees can be a tipping hazard, so consider securing your tree with fishing line. Additionally, for those with fresh-cut trees, water additives can pose a health risk to pets, so don’t add anything to tree water if you have pets in your home.
- Decorations, especially tinsel and easily breakable ornaments can be dangerous. Ingesting these items can cause intestinal blockages, internal injuries, or digestive illnesses. Electric lights can cause burns if a pet is tempted to chew on the cords.
- Batteries can be plentiful around the holidays, especially if there are new children’s toys being unwrapped, and they can be exceptionally hazardous to pets if chewed and/or swallowed. Batteries contain zinc, which can cause serious digestive and kidney damage.

- Holiday flowers and plants are lovely to look at, but several different ones can be dangerous – and even poisonous if a dog or cat gets ahold of them. Hazardous plants include Amaryllis, mistletoe, balsam, pine, cedar, holly, and poinsettias. If you have any of these plants in your home, keep them well out of the reach of furry paws.

Not surprisingly, but food also is an important part of holiday celebrations. Although many seasoned pet owners know the dangers of chocolate and artificial sweeteners, there are many other holiday foods that can be toxic to pets. If you plan on serving any of these items, please keep them far away from pets and make sure well-meaning guests also understand the importance of not sharing these foods with pets:

1. **Latkes** – this traditional Hanukkah dish is a high-fat treat that can cause pancreatitis; additionally, latkes are typically made with onions, which are toxic to both dogs and cats.
2. **High-fat, salty meats** – meats like ham and beef brisket are high in salt, which is potentially poisonous; brisket also is very high in fat, which can cause pancreatitis.
3. **Alcohol** – although a part of many holiday celebrations, it's very important to keep alcohol of any kind out of the reach of pets. Any amount of alcohol can be toxic and even lethal to cats and dogs.
4. **Other foods** – There is a wide range of foods that typically are present during the holidays that pet owners should keep out of the reach of dogs and cats. These include (but are not limited to):
 - **Meat carcasses**
 - **Grapes, raisins**
 - **Chocolate**
 - **Artificial sweeteners (xylitol)**
 - **Nuts**
 - **Yeast (baking doughs and batters)**

“Being prepared promotes peace of mind, especially in the midst of schedules that are busier than normal and plans that are out of the ordinary,” Dr. Plomin included. “In the event that your pet ingests something they shouldn't, be sure to keep the 24-hour ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center hotline readily available (888-426-4435) as well as your veterinarian's phone number and 24/7 emergency vet clinic.”

Lastly, CVMA recommends having your pet's immunizations up-to-date and carrying a copy of those records with you when traveling. If you're entertaining at home, make sure that ID collars are in place in case pets get loose in the commotion of welcoming guests. Pets and owners typically are reunited more quickly if collars are being worn and ID information is current.

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About the Chicago Veterinary Medical Association: Chicago Veterinary Medical Association is a professional network with a longstanding tradition that connects more than 1,000 veterinarians with comprehensive resources that support their continued development as champions of animal health while encouraging the fostering of the human-animal bond.

About the Chicago Veterinary Medical Foundation: The CVMF, established in 2009, is a 501[©]3 charity that works with Chicagoland veterinarians to provide financial assistance to pet families in need by helping with the costs of their pet's urgent, unexpected medical and surgical bills. The Foundation's work plays a vital role in strengthening the human-animal bond by helping sick and suffering pets get well again.