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Contact:

Ray McGury, Executive Director, Chicago Veterinary Medical Association, 630-461-0095, rmcgury@chicagovma.org

CVMA Encourages Adopting Pet-Safe Practices During Holiday Preparation, Celebrations *Enjoy annual traditions with family and friends while being aware and attentive to pet safety*

Now that Thanksgiving has passed, the holiday season has kicked into full gear with decorating and party planning taking place in many homes. The Chicago Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) reminds pet owners to carefully think through holiday decorations, foods, and traditions to help keep dogs and cats safe while minimizing stress for everyone.

“This is an exciting time of year when many people plan for the coming holidays with festive food and decorations,” said Dr. Marina Jaworsky, CVMA Board President. “While many pet owners are aware of some of the more well-known foods that are toxic to pets, not everyone is as aware of the dangers of non-edible items that are not only prevalent this time of year, but particularly dangerous to our furry friends.”

- Candles, which are frequently used in holiday decorations, can be dangerous to pets. Not only can paws, tails, or noses be burned, but a startled pet could knock over lit candles and start a fire.
- Consider securing your tree with a fishing line or a strong, stable tree stand to minimize the possibility of tipping. Fresh-cut tree aficionados need to be aware that water additives can pose a health risk to pets, so don’t add anything to tree water if you have pets in your home.
- Tinsel and easily breakable ornaments also can be dangerous as 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.

- Battery-operated tools, toys and decorations can be plentiful around the holidays; it's important to be aware that batteries, which contain zinc, can be exceptionally hazardous to pets if chewed and/or swallowed.
- Seasonal flowers and plants add beauty to holiday decorations, but several different kinds can be dangerous – and even poisonous – if a dog or cat gets ahold of them. Plants that pose a hazard to pets include Amaryllis, mistletoe, balsam, pine, cedar, holly, and poinsettias. If you have any of these plants in your home, keep them up and out of the reach of your pets.
- Winter holidays also mean that snowy and icy conditions may need to be managed. Instead of sidewalk salt, consider using cat litter or pet-safe products. Wash your pet's paws if they happen to pick up other types of salt while out on walks.
- Additionally, antifreeze (Ethylene glycol), is a highly toxic substance that has a sweet taste and remains in a liquid form when other liquids are frozen. Ingestion can quickly lead to kidney failure and death, so this situation requires an immediate trip to the veterinarian. Keep antifreeze wiped up and stored in secure containers.

Understandably, food is also an important part of holiday celebrations. Although many seasoned pet owners know the dangers of chocolate and artificial sweeteners, there are many other foods that are toxic to pets. If you plan on eating or serving any of these items, be sure to keep them away from pets and educate your guests on the importance of not sharing these foods with them:

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** – Any amount of alcohol can be toxic and even lethal to cats and dogs, therefore it's very important to keep alcohol of any kind out of the reach of pets.
4. **Other foods** – Additional foods that should be kept out of the reach of dogs and cats include (but are not limited to): meat carcasses, grapes/raisins, chocolate, artificial sweeteners, nuts, yeast (doughs and batters).

“In the event that your pet ingests something they shouldn’t, have 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,” recommended Jaworsky.

Finally, CVMA recommends ensuring that your pet’s immunizations are 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 if a pet gets loose outdoors. Pets and owners typically are reunited more quickly if collars are being worn and the owner’s contact 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^c3 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.