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Protect Your Pet's Health While Enjoying Easter and Passover Celebrations

CVMA reminds pet owners that holiday decorations, foods can be harmful

With the Easter and Passover holidays fast approaching, families are preparing to enjoy special annual holiday traditions that incorporate foods and materials that can be harmful to pets. The Chicago Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) reminds families to be cautious of potential dangers and take steps to keep their pets safe and healthy while celebrating the holidays.

1. Toxic Foods: Keep Them Away from Pets

Easter:

- **Chocolate:** Chocolate is a common treat at Easter, but it's highly toxic to pets, especially dogs and cats. Even small amounts can cause vomiting, diarrhea, seizures, or worse. Make sure any chocolate eggs or bunnies are kept well out of reach.
- **Candy with Xylitol:** Many candies (especially sugar-free varieties) contain xylitol, an artificial sweetener that is highly toxic to dogs and can cause rapid insulin release, leading to hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), liver failure, or even death.
- **Easter Baskets:** If you're preparing Easter baskets for kids, be careful with any small toys, wrapping materials, or plastic eggs, which can be a choking hazard or cause blockages if chewed or swallowed by pets.

Passover:

- **Matzah:** While not toxic, matzah (unleavened bread) can be hard for pets to digest, and large amounts can cause stomach upset or even blockages.
- **Gravy and Rich Foods:** If you're preparing a big Passover meal, ensure pets don't get access to gravy, fatty meats, or any of the rich dishes often served. These can lead to pancreatitis or digestive distress in pets.
- **Salt:** Some Passover foods are salty, and excess salt can cause dehydration or sodium ion poisoning in pets. Make sure pets don't get into food that has excessive salt content, like salted fish or pickles.

2. Easter Egg Hunts: Watch for Hidden Treats

Easter egg hunts are a classic Easter tradition, but they can be dangerous for pets if not properly planned:

- **Keep chocolate eggs away from pets:** Ensure that any chocolate eggs used in the hunt are hidden in places where your pets cannot reach them. Even the wrappers can be tempting, and if ingested, they can cause harm.
- **Plastic Eggs:** Make sure any plastic eggs used in the hunt are not small enough to be swallowed by your pets. Check around your yard or home for any leftover plastic eggs to avoid ingestion.
- **Eggshells:** If you're using real eggs for the hunt, be cautious with the eggshells. While they're not toxic, sharp pieces of eggshell could injure your pet's digestive tract if ingested.

3. Guest Visits and Crowded Spaces

Both Easter and Passover often involve gatherings of family and friends, which can cause stress for some pets. Here's how to manage:

- **Keep pets calm:** If your pet is anxious around unfamiliar people or lots of noise, create a safe, quiet space where they can retreat. This is especially important during busy dinners or celebrations.

- **Supervise food access:** With lots of people around, it's easy for pets to beg for food or even snatch unattended plates. Remind guests not to feed pets any human food, especially those that are dangerous (like chocolate or rich fatty foods).

4. Outdoor Celebrations

If you're hosting an outdoor gathering for Easter or Passover, be mindful of your pets' safety:

- **Supervise outdoor play:** If your pets are outside during the celebrations, make sure they're supervised at all times. Unattended pets could get into harmful foods, plants, or decorations.
- **Avoid exposure to toxic plants:** During both Easter and Passover, flowers and plants may be brought indoors or used as decorations. Keep in mind that certain plants like lilies (Easter) and various flowers could be toxic to pets. Be cautious about where you place them.

Quick Safety Checklist for Both Holidays:

1. Keep toxic foods like chocolate, candy with xylitol, and rich foods away from pets.
2. Supervise pets around small decorations, Easter eggs, and candles.
3. Create a quiet space for pets to retreat from noisy celebrations or large gatherings.
4. Be cautious with plants like lilies, and other flowers or foods that could harm pets.
5. Monitor pets during Easter egg hunts and other activities to avoid ingestion of harmful items.
6. Don't allow pets to have access to Passover or Easter foods unless they are specifically safe.

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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^(c)(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.