

'Tis the season....

by Dr Bart Nietrzeba MRCVS, MSc MedVet, Blacks Vets



We know, here at Blacks Vets we can hardly believe it's nearly Christmas time either! 2016 seems to have flown by, but the nights are definitely getting longer, the air a little chillier and the shops are loaded up with festive goodies.

The Christmas holidays are a great time to bring the whole family together and this of course extends to our pets, many of whom will relish the extra time spent with the people they love best. To make sure that this is truly the season of goodwill and happiness for everyone, here are some festive, pet-safety tips.

Beware of Jack Frost

As the weather turns colder, we need to consider the implications for our pets. Now is the time to cover outdoor hutches for rabbits or guinea pigs with thermal layers. Old towels and blankets are perfect. If possible, bring hutches inside or to a sheltered area such as a garage or shed. Rabbits and guinea pigs need to eat roughly their own body size in hay during the Winter and need roughly 4 times their size to provide sufficient warmth in their bedding areas. Keep an eye out for frozen water bottles and beware of dampness – wet bedding becomes cold and uncomfortable very quickly and can lead to illness.



With icy conditions comes slippery roads and unfortunately, road traffic accidents increase at this time of year. Remember to take extra care with breaking distances when in your car and try to walk your dog away from roads whenever you can. If your dog is older or short haired, it may be wise to invest in a warm pet jacket to

make walkies more comfortable. And remember, icy fingers can easily lose their grip on a lead so please make sure your dog's microchip has your up-to-date contact information. Find out more at www.blacksvets.co.uk

Perilous Poisons

The festive period is rife with potential pet poisons, so please be extra vigilant when disposing of waste food and Christmas detritus. Favourites such as mince pies and Christmas cake contain currants and raisins which can make dogs severely ill, as can alcohol and chocolate. Ask Santa to leave any gifts containing these on a high shelf and not under the tree!

Bones are sometimes given as a tasty post-Christmas dinner treat for dogs, though please resist the temptation to give in as they can cause a multitude of problems including blockages, choking, vomiting and bleeding. It's also at this time of year that we bring Poinsettia plants into the home which are poisonous to both cats and dogs as are Lilies which can be highly toxic, so make sure they are placed completely out of reach.

Though we may wrinkle our noses up at the noxious smell of anti-freeze, it smells delicious to dogs and cats, so make sure you thoroughly clean up any spillages or stray drops. Consumption can lead to fatal renal failure, so please, take your pet to a vet urgently if you suspect that this has happened. Symptoms of poisoning include vomiting, lethargy, diarrhoea, panting, drinking more or seeming unsteady and un-coordinated. **The Blacks Veterinary Hospital** in Dudley is open **24/7, 365 days a year so call 01384 252509 in an emergency.**



Changing Habits

And finally, Christmas is usually an exciting time complete with new sights, smells and sounds for an animal, which can become overwhelming. Try to keep a safe, quiet space for your pet to retreat to if they become agitated or upset. Cats in particular may change their regular habits and look to take refuge in unusual spaces. In cold weather this can include under warm car bonnets so always check before starting your car. Cats may also venture into sheds and outhouses for warmth and can become trapped or may be vulnerable to dangerous substances such as petrol or chemicals in aerosol cans.

With a little extra care, there's no reason why you and your pets shouldn't enjoy a happy and healthy festive period this year, but if you need us, Blacks Vets are always on hand to help. Wishing you all a very merry Christmas and happy new year from all of the Blacks Vets team!

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