



## Because Pets *Aren't* People, Too: Poison Control For Animals

**M**ost people in the United States are at least somewhat familiar with human poison control centers, and do's and don'ts of poison prevention in children and family members. However many people are not aware that poisonings are also a major issue for pets, too. It is important to get help if your pet is exposed to a harmful product or substance.

Fortunately, there is a way to get help any time of the day or night. For thirty years, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA®) Animal Poison Control Center (APCC) has managed incoming calls to the hotline 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This dedicated group of veterinary professionals handles emergency situations on a daily basis, when every minute counts and could mean the difference between life and death for the animals involved in more than 130,000 cases received by the Center each year.



### How did the APCC get started?

**T**he APCC is the nation's only poison control center devoted only to animals. The Center was founded at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine in 1978 by Dr. William Buck, a pioneering veterinary toxicologist. Dr. Buck and his graduate students first started handling calls, using a paging service, in a chicken coop!

At first, the hotline was intended to serve only Illinois, but when the Center's telephone number was broadcast on a national radio program and appeared on the label of a popular rodenticide, word of the service and its value spread quickly. Soon the number of calls began to grow, so much so that the service became too big for the University of Illinois to support.

In late 1995, the ASPCA learned of the APCC's struggle for funding. Representatives from the ASPCA visited the Center and decided that the service would

be a perfect addition to the wide variety of programs already provided by their organization. One year later, in 1996, the ASPCA acquired the Center from the University of Illinois, and the center moved it to its current facility.

### What is an average day like at the APCC?

It is just before 3:00 P.M. on a Friday afternoon, and the evening staff at the APCC is just beginning their day. Although they have no exam rooms or any diagnostic equipment, they have their hands full of patients tonight—many of whom are in urgent need of care from an expert well trained in the field of toxicology, or the science of poisons and how they affect the body.

During a busy shift, APCC veterinarians may field as many as thirty cases. While some are fairly routine (dogs eating grass treated with weed killer, cats drooling from licking themselves after being misted with a flea spray), many cases are unusual. For

example, one evening a veterinarian called regarding a three-pound, three month-old kitten who had tumbled out of a 13-story window. According to the local vet, the kitten's pet parents ran down to pick him up and gave him some infant painkiller drops, mistakenly thinking they were easing his pain. What the owners did not realize was that the painkiller, acetaminophen, is very toxic to cats. Fortunately, thanks to the quick action of the owners and help from the APCC, the kitten didn't get sick from the medicine and survived the whole ordeal. What's more, the kitten didn't suffer any broken bones or other injuries from the fall. This was truly one very lucky kitten!

Then there was the case of a 50-pound standard poodle and his "partner in crime," a 60-pound golden retriever. The owners had left them alone in the house for several hours. While they were out, one or both dogs chewed up a bottle of pills, ate two tubes of ear drops, and broke an urn containing the ashes of the owner's beloved cat and feasted on those, too! These two cavorting canines were

also lucky, for neither of them developed any problems from their memorable escapade, other than sour stomachs.

While these situations are fortunate and perhaps funny, many cases APCC experts handle don't have happy endings. Callers are often extremely upset, as a cherished family member has just ingested something potentially toxic, and they are concerned that serious problems may result.






One afternoon an APCC staff member received a frantic call from a pet parent whose pet duck had just eaten an unknown quantity of highly poisonous insect killer. During the first minutes of the call, the duck went from having trouble breathing to dying in the owner's arms. In one instant, the focus of the call shifted from poison control to grief counseling—another important role of the APCC.

Guest featured writer is Dana Farbman, a Certified Veterinary Technician; she has been on staff at the APCC for over ten years.

## HOW CAN KIDS HELP PREVENT PET POISONINGS?

**B**ecause poisoning emergencies happen every day to animals, it is very important to be alert to items in the home that can be harmful to pets. The following are tips to help teach kids how they can help prevent poisonings; and what to do if they suspect their pet may have been exposed to something harmful.

### PET POISON PREVENTION TIPS FOR KIDS

-  Remind your parents to never give medicine to your pets unless your veterinarian has said it is safe.
-  Help your mom and dad make sure that household items like cleaners, insect sprays, and lawn chemicals that should be kept away from young kids are also out of your pet's reach.
-  Don't share food with your pet: some "people food" can upset your pet's stomach and can even be poisonous.
-  When you take your dog on walks, don't let him chew on fallen leaves, flowers, trash or things on the ground.
-  Help your parents by learning the names of the plants in and around your house and make sure they are safe for pets.



## Activity Sheet 1 K-5

**Y**ears ago children were warned of a potentially poisonous household item with the aid of little green stickers featuring a not-so-smiley face and the word, “**POISON.**” Parents were encouraged to put these stickers on things around the house that, if swallowed, could be dangerous or fatal.

The following activity is a fun and creative way for your students to get involved in their own safety and the safety of their pets. Your students will make “Pet Poison Prevention” stickers that they can design, decorate, and affix to the many household items, including foods that are harmful to their furry friends. As an extension activity, students can make another sheet of stickers for things that are harmful to humans, particularly themselves and their younger siblings.

You will need to provide materials for coloring (crayons or markers) as well as labels for the stickers. Computer mailing labels size 2x4” work best and come in sheets of ten. They have enough surface area for writing and drawing, and each student can make one or two sheets, depending on the time your class has for the project.

Begin by giving a lesson on poison prevention for pets. Explain that many of the things that are safe for humans to eat or drink can be toxic for their dog or cat. Obtain an accurate list of household items that are toxic to pets from the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at [www.asPCA.org/apcc](http://www.asPCA.org/apcc).

Ask the students to come up with a list of items they think are poisonous and then ask them to research them to confirm which ones are toxic. If the idea is new to them, you may want to

formulate the list for them, and discuss each item before beginning the activity.

Give each student one sheet of labels and crayons or markers. Instruct them to make enough labels for the listed items they have in their homes. They can write a statement indicating that the item is poisonous to their pets and, if they want, add a drawing of the item to the sticker. Some ideas for statements are: “Don’t Feed to Fluffy!” or “Danger to Dogs!” Of course, these statements can be personalized with their own pets names, etc.

\*Advise students to ask their parent/guardian before affixing stickers to household items like plants, etc. If parents object, suggest the student affix the sticker to an index card and place it on or near the object.

### STANDARDS:

**NCTE English Language Arts # 4:**  
Communications Skills

**NSAE Arts Education #1:**  
Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes

## Activity Sheet 2 Grades 3-5

**B**lossoms are beautiful, but they can be dangerous to the pets with whom we share our homes and neighborhoods. Your students may enjoy creating illustrated books depicting which plants are safe for pets and which ones are toxic.



You may choose to address technology standards by requiring students to create the pages of the book on a computer. Alternatively, you may choose to ask your students to practice penmanship and drawing or other art skills. The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center has compiled a list of toxic and nontoxic plants from A to Z. Those that are toxic are listed with pictures and symptoms. How much information you ask your students to include can vary based on grade and ability level. You may also prompt them to develop a visual coding system that will quickly identify those plants and flowers that are safe from those that are not.

As a service component, students may wish to create copies for their local garden or nursery center. You can also, as a class, come up with additional ways to share this information throughout your community.

### STANDARDS:

**NCTE English Language Arts #4:**  
Communication Skills

**NCTE English Language Arts #6:**  
Applying Knowledge

**NCTE English Language Arts #12:**  
Applying Language Skills

**NAEA Visual Arts #1:**  
Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

**NAEA Visual Arts #2:**  
Using knowledge of structures and functions

**NAEA Visual Arts #3:**  
Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter symbols, and ideas

**ISTE Technology #3:**  
Productivity Tools

**ISTE Technology #4:**  
Communication Tools

**ISTE Technology #5:**  
Research Tools



## Activity Sheet 3 Grades 6-8

**A**pproximately every four seconds in the United States, an anxious pet owner or treating veterinarian dials the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center, looking for up-to-the minute information about suspected accidental poisoning, antidotes, and medical treatment. Common everyday items are often the most dangerous, such as a carelessly placed medicine bottle, a tempting bar of dark chocolate or rat bait left where a pet can get it.

Students should learn about pet dangers, how to recognize a potential poisoning situation, and how and when to obtain outside help from a medical professional.

Students will research via the Internet common household poisons, their effects on pets, and how to reach a certified Veterinary Toxicologist for treatment advice. Students may be surprised to learn that items often believed to be dangerous to our pets, such as Poinsettia plants, may not be as threatening as we previously thought!

Science, math, research & technology and health are just a few of the educational standards addressed with this activity.

Extension Activity: Students may create refrigerator magnets listing common household items which may be poisonous to pets, as well as create hazardous materials stickers to place on potentially poisonous items in the household, creating greater awareness among family members.



### STANDARDS:

**NAS Science #6:**

Personal and Social Perspectives

**ACS Health #1:**

Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

**NCTM Mathematics #4:**

Measurements

**ISTE Technology #5:**

Technology Research Tools

## Activity Sheet 4 Grades 3-8

**P**ets may accidentally ingest harmful or poisonous substances found in the home.

The objective of this lesson is for students to identify these situations and how they could have been prevented. Upper grades can research the chemicals and ingredients in these items that make them harmful or poisonous to pets.



Instruct each student to read the scenario and identify which substances could be dangerous for the pet. Ask each student to determine how the problem could have been prevented. They will write an alternative story where each animal is safe and protected. Older students can also research how and why each substance is harmful or poisonous to pets.

### STANDARDS:

**NCTE Language Arts #3:**

Evaluation Strategies

**NCTE Language Arts #4:**

Communication Skills

**NCTE Language Arts #8:**

Developing Research Skills

**NCTE Language Arts #8:**

Developing Research Skills

**NAS Science #3:**

Life Science

**NAS Science #6:**

Personal and Social Perspectives



## Pet Poison Prevention STICKERS

**DID YOU KNOW THAT MANY FOODS, PLANTS AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD ITEMS CAN HARM YOUR PETS IF THEY EAT THEM? THIS ACTIVITY WILL HELP YOU AND YOUR FAMILY PROTECT YOUR PETS, AND WARN FAMILY MEMBERS WHEN HOUSEHOLD ITEMS CAN BE HARMFUL TO YOUR FURRY FRIENDS.**

**Y**ou will create “Pet Poison Prevention” stickers to place on items in your home that are dangerous to your pet. Decorate the labels with drawings, and write warning statements like “Don’t Feed to Fluffy!” or “Danger to Dogs!!” You can come up with other creative catchy phrases that will alert family members and remind them to keep that item away from any pets in your home.

With your teachers help, create a list of household items that are dangerous to pets or read the list he or she gives to you.

Pick out some of the items on the list that you have in your own home. On the labels provided by your teacher, draw a picture of the item, and add one of your warning statements. Make a label for each of the items on your list and continue you work at home if necessary.

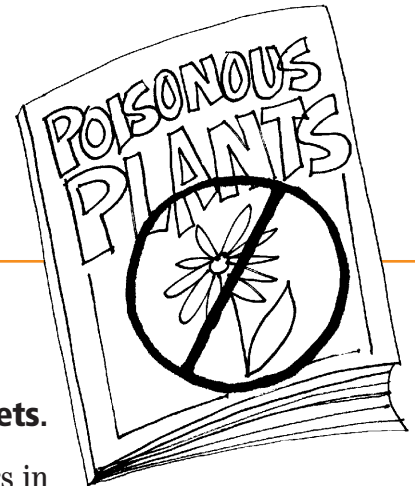
As an extra activity, make labels for things in your home that are harmful to humans. For example, a cleaning product that will make you sick if you or a younger sister or brother swallows it. Decorate the label the same way, but this time add a warning statement that says “Harmful to Humans!”

**\*Please ask your parent or guardian if it’s okay to attach your stickers to the items in your home. If not, attach your sticker to an index card or a piece of paper and place it near the object or food.\***





## April Showers Bring... May Flowers



**In some climates flowers are blooming, in others, one waits for Spring with baited breath. When it comes, blossoms bloom and some potential poisons for our pets.**

Make an illustrated book outlining the common plants and flowers in your neighborhood that are safe and not-so-safe for cats, dogs and horses. You may even choose to make copies to share with friends and family or to leave as a reference at your local garden store or nursery.

Visit [www.asPCA.org/apcc](http://www.asPCA.org/apcc) to find the most common safe and toxic (poisonous) plants for pets. The site includes pictures of the toxic plants you can print or use as a guide for your own illustrations. For the safe plants, you may need to do some additional Internet research to find a picture.

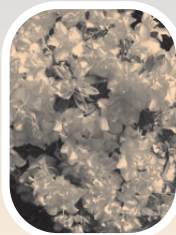
### Toxic Plants for Pets



amaryllis



autumn crocus



azalea



cyclamen



chrysanthemum



english ivy



gladiola



oleander



peace lily



pothos



tulip



sago palm



## Create Poison Awareness Magnets

ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center  
**1-888-426-4435**

**D**id you know that almost every minute of every day, a pet is poisoned somewhere? Just like children, pets don't always know what can be dangerous for them to eat or drink. That box of chocolates on the coffee table? It seems like a great snack. It's fun to grab a few when you're watching TV. Your friends love to come to your house because the candy dish is always full. Well, someone else loves that chocolate, too, but instead of satisfying his sweet tooth, he could die from eating the chocolate. We are talking about your dog, your favorite furry family member. Our pets have a knack for getting into mischief, but it is up to us to keep them safe.

Medicine, chocolate and plants are some of the most common items that can poison our pets. Creating a refrigerator magnet, with the hotline number for the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (1-888-426-4435), as well as a list of some of the most common poisonous items, symptoms of poisoning and basic first aid tips, is a great way to share the knowledge you've gained about pet poisoning.

Do a search on the Internet to find a list of the most common poisonous plants eaten by pets, what to do if your pet is poisoned and first aid for pets. Get creative! Design a colorful background and use graphics or clip art to give your list an artistic flair. You can purchase magnet paper for your printer at any office supply store. If magnet paper is not available, create poison awareness stickers to alert friends and family.



## Creative Writing

Read the following scenarios and answer the questions with the correct answer from the list below.

**O**ne day the door to the garage was open and Pickles the dog decided to investigate. She noticed a liquid on the ground and started licking. It tasted good so she didn't stop. A few minutes later she got very sick. Her pet parent took her to the vet immediately. **What substance was on the ground?**

**N**ina is a cat who likes to open cabinet doors with her paw. One day she went into the cabinet under the bathroom sink and knocked over a bottle. The lid came off the bottle and some of the liquid got on her fur. She ran out of the cabinet and tried to lick some of the liquid off her fur. Nina got very sick and had to go to the vet. **What was in the bottle?**

**D**elila is a dog who likes to eat. She loves her dog food, but she also likes "people" food. One day, Delila ate some food that was left on the counter. A few minutes later, she started to shake and vomit, and her pet parent immediately took her to the vet. **What did Delila eat?**

**A**lex is a cat who loves to eat plants and flowers. His pet parent even gives him a fresh grass plant for him to enjoy. One day, Alex began chewing on a gift that his pet parent had received. He started foaming at the mouth and was rushed to the vet. **What did Alex ingest?**

**C**layton is a dog who loves to play. Whenever he sees an object on the floor, he will immediately play with it. Clayton was enjoying a plastic bottle, rolling it around on the floor, but when it hit the wall, the cap opened. Clayton ate what was in the bottle. A few minutes later, he started shaking and having trouble breathing. He was immediately taken to the vet. **What was in the bottle?**

**H**ow could each of these situations have been prevented? Rewrite each scenario so each animal is safe and protected. Each of these substances contains an ingredient or chemical that makes it poisonous or harmful to pets. **Research these substances to determine how and why they are poisonous or harmful to pets.**



Lilies



Aspirin



Antifreeze



Bleach



Onions