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For immediate release

Pet Safety for the Holidays

The holidays are here. Mistletoe, Christmas trees and fruitcakes herald the return of a joyous season. For our pets, however, human holiday traditions can herald a trip to the veterinarian.

Food and drinks are the common culprits. Bones can become lodged anywhere along a pet's digestive track. Chocolate can be toxic, and fatty foods and alcohol can have serious consequences for a pet.

Dr. Dianne Mawby, an emergency clinician at the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine, says indulging your pet can lead to gastrointestinal upset. "If a pet gets a lot of fatty foods it may have stomach upset with vomiting and diarrhea. In more serious cases, it can develop a disease called pancreatitis, and it is as painful as it sounds. Pancreatitis can lead to hospitalization, IV fluids and a lot of expense," she said. The veterinarian added that cellophane wraps, candy foils and turkey string are dangerous for pets, too.

Pet owners should also take care with their holiday decorations. While decorations can set the mood for the season, they can also set the scene for a trip to the vet. "Cats love to play with those decorations — every veterinarian knows about 'tinsel kitty' where the cat will play with tinsel and actually eat it and may require surgery to remove it," said Mawby. "So try to stay away from long tinsels on the tree with kitty."

Mawby says other decorations can also be worrisome. "If you have pets it is also a good idea to anchor the Christmas tree and keep an eye on your wrapped gifts under the tree," she said. Traditional holiday plants such as ivy, holly, mistletoe and poinsettias are toxic, and Mawby advises you to call a veterinarian immediately if you suspect your pet has chewed or ingested these items.

If you plan to board your pet while you travel make sure your pet has the required vaccinations and leave emergency contact information in case the kennel needs to contact you, she said.

Following a few simple precautions will help keep the holidays safe and fun for humans and pets.