

# PETS ON POT

by Cheryl K. Smith

*“It’s pretty embarrassing to take your dog to the vet and have him fail a drug test.”*

Some people think that if they enjoy something, their pets will, too. Or we think it’s funny to blow pot smoke in a cat’s face and watch her get crazy. But did you know that marijuana can be toxic to pets?

Veterinarians report that they are encountering more incidents of marijuana poisoning in pets, mostly dogs. It’s usually an accident, when an animal ingests marijuana in edibles, some bud dropped on the floor, or even discarded trimmings. As more patients are growing their own in Oregon, we can expect even more of these accidents unless we are careful to keep these products away from our pets.

While *Cannabis sativa* contains more than 60 cannabinoids, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the most toxic, affecting the nervous system. According to *A Guide to Plant Poisoning of Animals in North America*, cattle, horses, pigs and dogs have been intoxicated after eating marijuana. Pollen from the flowers can also cause allergy in humans and dogs.

The most common clinical effects of marijuana ingestion in pets are depression and listlessness, ataxia (loss of motor coordination, including loss of balance), vomiting and hypothermia (low body temperature). The animal’s eyes are often dilated and he may lose his appetite and not drink enough water. Other signs can include bradycardia (slow heartbeat) or tachycardia (fast heartbeat), agitation, vocalization, vomiting, diarrhea, hypersalivation (drooling), urinary incontinence, seizures, and in severe cases, coma or death.

The neurotoxic effects of cannabis ingestion in animals usually occur within a half hour to two hours of eating it and usually last for about 12 hours. However, they can last for days because the cannabinoids are stored in fat.

If your pet has gotten into some marijuana or marijuana-laced products, don’t wait for symptoms to start; treat him or get him to a veterinarian. If your pet has the symptoms of cannabis poisoning and there is a

chance he could have ingested marijuana, he needs treatment. Be honest with the veterinarian about what you think is the cause. Vets are not obligated to report such a poisoning, and they need this information to properly treat the animal. It also may save you the expense of further testing. Some veterinarians use human drug tests to try to diagnose marijuana poisoning, but according to an article in the *Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association*, such tests are not effective for identifying marijuana in the urine from dogs that are suspected or known to have ingested cannabis.

The main treatment for marijuana toxicity is to give the animal activated charcoal orally. (Activated charcoal can be purchased at a drug store or feed store and is a good product to keep on hand.) The activated charcoal traps toxins as it goes through the digestive system. Other treatments include keeping the pet warm, minimizing sensory stimuli and, if she has vomited or had diarrhea, giving fluids.

If you discover the marijuana ingestion right away, take your pet to a veterinarian, who can induce vomiting to prevent poisoning. After about a half hour or so, however, the anti-nausea effects of the cannabis make it more difficult to induce vomiting, and if the animal is lethargic, vomiting may lead to aspiration with further complications.

If you have given activated charcoal and your pet shows severe symptoms or isn't getting better, get her to a veterinarian. Veterinarians can give supportive treatment such as IV fluids and other medications if the animal goes into a coma. Animals with marijuana poisoning rarely die, although it can happen.

Just as you would keep marijuana, hashish or edibles away from small children (who also can get poisoned, even to the point of coma), keep it away from your pets. Compost waste materials in a closed container where dogs can't get to them. Don't blow smoke in their face. Pot isn't for pets!

Cheryl K. Smith is an attorney and Executive Director of Compassion Center in Eugene, Oregon. She is also the author of *Goat Health Care and Raising Goats for Dummies*.