

Protect your pets from lethal treats and heat this Christmas

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Credit: University of Queensland

Sharing is not caring when it comes to your pets at Christmas with many tasty festive delights on the naughty list for furry family members.

UQ School of Veterinary Science staff are warning [pet owners](#) to avoid

sharing Christmas ham, pudding, cake, grapes, macadamia nuts and chocolate with their dogs and cats.

Head of Emergency and Critical Service at UQ VETS Small Animal Hospital Dr Mark Haworth said at this time of year many pets can suffer unnecessary distress, and even death, due to food that is toxic to animals.

"People think they're giving their animals a festive treat when they share their Christmas goodies but instead they could be killing them with kindness," Dr Haworth said.

"Ham can be fatty which can cause pancreatitis in dogs, a potentially life-threatening condition that causes serious vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, and raised temperatures, and can be difficult to diagnose.

"Raisins in Christmas pudding and Christmas cake can cause kidney failure in dogs along with grapes.

"Also keep macadamia nuts, and foods containing them, away from your dogs as they can cause vomiting, fever, sore joints, and wobbliness."

Dr Haworth said most people were aware that chocolate of any variety was dangerous for dogs, with dark chocolate the most lethal.

Chocolate contains theobromine, which in large enough doses causes heart problems, hyperactivity, diarrhoea, vomiting, blood pressure issues, seizures and potentially death.

"Don't feed dogs chocolate under any circumstances, and don't leave chocolate foods like cake unattended where animals may have access," Dr Haworth said.

Pet owners wishing to give their animals a Christmas food treat should

check with their vet or veterinary nurse who could advise on appropriate diets.

Dr Haworth said people should also take steps to avoid [heat stroke](#) in dogs during summer high temperatures and humidity.

"Heat stroke is a serious condition that requires immediate medical attention, but cooling is the key so you should hose your dogs for 10 to 15 minutes before taking them to the vet," he said.

"Heat stroke can affect a dog's brain, bone marrow, heart, lungs, liver and kidneys, and symptoms can include heavy panting, staggering, seizures, diarrhoea, vomiting, collapse or coma.

"Dogs most at risk are overweight, older, have a darker coloured coat, or have pushed-in faces like bulldogs and pugs.

"These breeds are known as brachycephalic (flat-faced) and they are more likely to have airway obstruction issues, leading to snoring and snorting.

"Unlike humans who sweat, [dogs](#) will pant to try to keep cool on hot days, and if they are a breed whose breathing is already obstructed they are at risk.

"Their quality of life can be greatly improved by talking to your vet to determine if surgery is required to improve their breathing."

Dr Haworth said people should not leave pets unattended in vehicles even with the windows down, should avoid leaving them outside without access to shade or water, should not exercise them in the middle of the day, and sometimes avoid exercising them early in the evening on very hot days.

"Keep a close eye on your animals and keep them hydrated during hot summer days - many pet owners even use a plastic kiddie pool to cool them down," he said.

Provided by University of Queensland

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