

How to keep your pets safe from marijuana poisoning

February 8 2019, by Colleen Dell, Erin Wasson And Kevin Cosford



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

If you live with a pet, there is a good chance you consider it to be a member of your family. It is well established that companion animals, ranging from cats and dogs through to birds and rodents, can [have a positive health benefit in our lives](#).

When [cannabis](#) was legalized in the parts of the United States, there were substantial increases in marijuana-related [visits to children's hospitals](#) and calls to [poison control centres](#). Pets are [just as vulnerable](#)—just like our human family members, pets are susceptible to getting sick.

Working as a researcher, a veterinarian and a [social worker](#) at the University of Saskatchewan, we have teamed up to help prevent the same occurring this side of the border in Canada.

Dogs are attracted to cannabis

The latest estimate and purchase data shows that a sizeable amount of recreational cannabis has been purchased [since it was legalized in October 2018](#).

Alongside an available illegal supply, this increases the chance of pet intoxication from cannabis.

Also, with the [production and sale of cannabis edibles in the works](#) for October 2019, the risk of exposure will be even greater. Pets may also be exposed to medical cannabis.

At the University of Saskatchewan we are studying the effectiveness of service [dogs](#) as [psychiatric support for veterans who have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#).

A large percentage of the veterans we work with are prescribed medical cannabis, and we know first-hand that dogs are attracted to it. Planning for the animal's safety is key for both the dog and the veteran.

Dogs more sensitive to psychotropic effects

Intoxication typically occurs from eating recreational or medical cannabis, but second-hand smoke can affect animals as well.

How long cannabis intoxication will last depends on such factors as the amount consumed, the level of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) concentration and the size of the pet.

Although considered rare, in some cases cannabis toxicity can be fatal. This is of particular concern for dogs because of their remarkable ability to locate interesting smells, and sometimes ingest the source. We also know that [dogs are more sensitive than people to the psychotropic \(mind-altering\) effects](#) of THC.

Following the ABCs of cannabis safety for pets should help keep all members of your family safe. Here is what you need to know.

How to keep your pets safe

- **Appropriate storage:** All cannabis, cannabis products and accessories should be securely stored and be kept out of reach of pets. This includes byproducts such as cigarette butts, roaches or bong water. An empty 900 gram coffee can, with a secure top, can work well.
- **Be aware of poisoning signs and symptoms:** In pets this can present as uncoordinated movement, balance disturbances, disorientation, hyperactivity, dilated pupils, vocalization, drooling, variations in temperature and heart rate rhythms and possibly dribbling urine.
- **In severe cases, [seizures, tremors and coma can result](#).** It is really important to tell your veterinarian if you think your pet has consumed cannabis. A quick diagnosis may save your pet's life and possibly money on your vet bill.
- **Connect with support when needed :** If your pet is showing signs

of poisoning, it is important to get them immediate medical care. Your veterinarian can help monitor and regulate your pet's vital signs and keep them safe. A specific treatment plan will be made by the attending veterinarian based on the patient's current clinical condition.

Signs of poisoning can be immediate or may occur hours after exposure and can be short-lived or last for several days. For a \$50 USD fee, you can also contact the [Pet Poison Helpline](#).

Hemp is not approved for animals

Many people are unaware that both recreational and medical cannabis products can be harmful to our pets. Because medical cannabis is prescribed, it is often thought to be made up of mostly non-psychoactive CBD (cannabidiol), but it can contain high levels of THC. It is also common for [medical cannabis](#) products to be in concentrated forms, such as oils, and therefore potentially more harmful if ingested by pets.

Pets are also being increasingly exposed to hemp products —specifically as a remedy for pet ailments such as pain and anxiety. [Hemp contains a very low level of THC](#), less than 0.3 per cent.

Although there is an abundance of stories about people using it to improve their pet's health, it is important to know that there is little scientific evidence. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association notes that cannabis use of any type is not approved for animals and [could interact with other medications and have unknown side effects](#). There is a [need for research in this area](#).

Can your cannabis

As with any beloved family member, knowing the facts is essential. This enables us to make informed choices and behave in responsible ways on our pets' behalf.

University of Saskatchewan Peer Health has led the development of a *Can Your Cannabis* container outlining the ABCs of cannabis safety for pets and people. This is available for free to campus students and clients of the Western College of Veterinary Medicine.

And if an accident does occur, after receiving medical attention most dogs will recover. Following the ABCs of cannabis safety for pets can help prevent unnecessary suffering for all family members.

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