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Avoid a pet emergency this Valentine's Day; Veterinary hospital suggests PET-SAFE alternatives to traditional gifts and treats

Birmingham, MI – January 31, 2012 -- Every Valentine's Day veterinary emergency hospitals are busy treating pets that have eaten their owner's Valentine chocolate or bouquet of flowers, both of which can be fatal to pets. Caring for a seriously ill and beloved pet is not only scary, but costly, and can be avoided with some simple precautions, says veterinary nurse Tabitha Owens of The Cat Practice veterinary hospital in Birmingham, Michigan.

Owens says that many common Valentine's traditions – like chocolate and most flowers -- can be fatal to cats, dogs and other pets. Pets that have eaten chocolate – and that have come into contact with some flowers -- can show signs of poisoning within a few hours. If left untreated, they can die.

The best way to avoid a Valentine tragedy involving your pet is to look for safe alternatives to some popular Valentine treats and gifts, Owens says. So if you have pets – or if you are looking for the perfect Valentine gift for a pet owner -- Owens offers these suggestions

Candy

- Both dark and milk chocolate can be fatal to pets, especially baker's chocolate. Instead of dark or milk chocolate consider white chocolate, which is much less likely to cause a problem.
- If you MUST have chocolate in the house make sure it's kept out of reach. And don't assume plastic wrap is enough to keep a curious kitty or pup from taking a nibble!
- Sugar-free candies contain xylitol, which is dangerous if ingested. If your Valentine cannot have candy for health reasons, consider lovely baskets of dried fruits, fresh fruits or nuts.



Silk flowers, white chocolate, flameless candles and gift bags without ribbon are pet-safe choices for Valentine's. Items pictured from Home Goods.

Flowers

- Lilies, tulips, carnations and baby's breath are all toxic for pets. For cats, even brushing up against a lily flower can be fatal. Instead of fresh flowers, consider a silk bouquet (which also lasts longer!).
- If fresh flowers are a must, ask the florist for a pet-friendly bouquet by substituting baby's breath with greenery such as ferns, and using non-toxic blooms like roses, orchids, snapdragons, African violets, African daisies, or begonias.

Candles

- Each year, pets get burned by hot wax or by catching their fur on fire in a candle flame. Instead of traditional wax candles, choose battery operated ones that provide the same romantic glow without the flame.
- If candles are a must, keep them way out of reach of curious paws or noses. Choose candles in a glass jar that are less likely to leak hot wax or tip over.

Gift wrap

- Synthetic ribbons often get chewed up and can get lodged in your pet's throat or digestive tract. Instead, consider a cute gift bag with light tissue paper, rather than decorative grass or ribbon.
- Instead of traditional synthetic wrapping paper choose natural paper wrapping paper.

What to do if you suspect your pet has consumed something toxic

Despite the best precautions, pets – like children – often get into things. Owens says that it's always good advice to watch pets closely and take any behavior changes seriously.

"If your pet is 'not acting quite right,' not eating or appears lethargic, it's time to get to the veterinarian, Owens says. "Pets often mask their illness. So by the time they start showing symptoms, they are really sick or it may be too late."

About Tabitha Owens, Licensed Veterinary Technician and Veterinary Nurse

As a veterinary nurse and licensed veterinary technician, Owens works closely alongside veterinarians to act as a physician's assistant in all aspects of veterinary medicine, including outpatient care, hospitalization, treatment, diagnostics and surgery. She has a special interest in pet behavior, and has been with The Cat Practice for 9 years.

About The Cat Practice

The Cat Practice, Michigan's first cats-only veterinary hospital, opened in 1981. Open seven days a week and evenings, The Cat Practice provides advanced preventative and medical care with an emphasis on early detection to help cats live longer, better and healthier lives. Located at 875 South Worth in Birmingham, Michigan, The Cat Practice cares for feline purebred and mixed breeds from around southeastern Michigan. For information go to www.thecatpracticepc.com or call 248-540-3390.