

Fall is an exciting time. Kids go back to school. The holiday season approaches. The Seahawks return. It can be a fun season for pets too as weather starts to cool down and they can become more active. However, the change in season brings with it a new list of potential hazards for pets.

As the kids return to school, school supplies return to the house. Most of these are not toxic, but for the households with pets who like to chew, care should be taken to avoid ingestion of anything that could potentially cause an obstruction. Erasers, rubber bands and glue sticks are common school supplies that animals, including cats, like to ingest. A particularly toxic school item is homemade play dough. Play dough's extremely high salt content can be dangerously high for many animals. Ingestion of any of these items warrants a visit to the veterinarian immediately.

With the return of colder weather, preparation of houses and recreational vehicles is necessary. This can involve using several substances that are toxic to pets. Rodenticides are commonly used this time of year as rodents begin seeking the shelter of homes to get away from the cold. All rodenticides are toxic to pets.

Antifreeze is another common cold weather toxin as it is used frequently to prepare boats and RV's for winter. Most antifreeze contains ethylene glycol, which is highly toxic to animals. "Non-toxic" antifreeze contains propylene glycol and is less toxic. Antifreeze has a sweet flavor and is very palatable to animals, so they will readily drink it. Even "non-toxic" antifreeze can become toxic if a large enough volume is ingested. If you suspect any exposure of rodenticide or antifreeze to your pet, please contact a veterinarian immediately.

As pets enjoy more time outside in the cooler weather, there are a few hazards to consider. Allergies are common this time of year as many tree pollens, molds and fungi are found in high quantities in the air. Allergies in dogs and cats are usually associated with itchiness. You may notice hair loss, skin rashes, and even skin infections depending on the severity of allergies. Leaf and compost piles are also common. Ingestion of decaying leaves or compost can cause a range of toxicity, from mild stomach upset to neurologic abnormalities.

Finally, no discussion of fall would be complete without including Halloween. Halloween brings a host of potential hazards. The stress of frequent visitors, superstitions involving black cats, candles and holiday lights and dietary indiscretion are all common concerns. Animals should be secured in a quiet, low stress environment during Halloween and care should be taken to prevent them from escaping. Black cats should be kept inside. Ingestion of candy will often cause only mild stomach upset, but ingestion of dark chocolate or high amounts of milk chocolate can cause severe toxicity. Xylitol, a sweetener found in sugar free candy, is also toxic to pets and should be avoided.