



Tips to create a safe Halloween for your pets

Halloween is a fun time for families, children and our four-legged friends as well. However, Halloween can be a frightening time for pet owners and scary for our furry friends too.

As veterinarians, we encourage pet owners to protect their four-legged family members this Halloween, paying particular attention to their food, environment, and attire.

Treats/Food

Halloween means candy and tasty treats are often easily accessible to young children and pets. Candy, especially chocolate, is toxic to animals and can cause vomiting, restlessness, heart disturbances, and even death. Although grapes and raisins are a healthy alternative snack for humans, they can be potentially deadly for dogs. These fruits contain a toxin that can damage dogs' kidneys and cause kidney failure. Also toxic to pets are sugarless gum and mints containing xylitol.

Candy wrappers can also cause health problems. Animals may eat the wrapper, causing obstruction or irritation to the pet's digestive system. Candy and wrappers should be kept out of pets' reach and young children should be taught not to share Halloween goodies with their pet.

Seasonal foods such as pumpkins and corn may cause minor stomach irritation; however, they are relatively safe for Fluffy and Fido. Pumpkin seeds may cause digestive system obstruction if consumed by smaller animals.

Environment

Due to increased foot traffic and activity in your neighborhood, outdoor pets should be kept indoors during the days surrounding Halloween. Unsupervised outdoor animals are susceptible to stress, inhumane practical jokes or theft.

Providing a safe, stress-free environment reduces the likelihood of your pet injuring himself or others.

Loud and excessive noise created by trick-or-treaters can frighten your cat or dog. Animals should be kept away from the door and out of hearing range as much as possible of a constantly ringing doorbell and excited children by putting them in a room where they will not be disturbed by noise and activity. A frightened or upset pet may run out the door at the first opportunity and could harm the children in its way.

Be sure decorations are safe from the paws and teeth of curious pets. Crepe paper streamers, fake cobwebs, glow sticks, plastic spiders and cardboard wall hangings can easily be chewed and swallowed, damaging your pet's digestive tract. Animals can also tip over the candle in a jack-o-lantern and burn themselves or start a fire. Keep decorations out of animals' reach, and maintain supervision if they play nearby.

Pet Costumes

Transforming your pet into a superhero, witch, ghost, or goblin can be fun but it may also be a stressful and unpleasant experience. Some animals love to be dressed up, but others may dread it. If your pet doesn't mind dressing up, make sure that you select a costume that doesn't restrict its normal movements, breathing or vision.

Pets are better off left at home during trick-or-treating excursions. However, if they do tag along, keep them on a shorter leash and harness to keep them from danger.

Planning Ahead

It is important to have a plan if your pet becomes sick, injured or lost this Halloween season. Since time is critical during any accident, pet owners should always have easy and quick access to their veterinary contact information.

It is also important to ensure that your pet's identification tags and micro chip information are up to date.

Halloween can and should be a fun time for you and your pets. Take time to prepare and ensure that it is a safe holiday for everyone in your household. If you do suspect your pet has eaten chocolate or digested other potentially harmful food or objects, call your veterinarian immediately.

This article is contributed by the professional staff at Deer Creek Animal Hospital with information provided by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA). For more information, www.dcah.com or 303-973-4200.

Tips for you and your pet on Halloween:

- Walk your dog before trick-or-treaters start their visits and then keep them indoors for the night.
- Find a secure place in your home to keep your pets for the evening and provide chew toys, a blanket or other comforts. Many animals get loose when the door opens, increasing the chance they will run away or be injured.
- Make sure your pet is wearing an up-to-date I.D. tag.
- Place a pet gate at your front door to block access in case your pet does get loose in the house.
- If you have your dog near the door to greet visitors, keep him on leash. Pets can become very stressed by holiday activities and interruptions. A nervous dog might feel threatened and growl, lunge or bite.
- Keep pets out of the candy bowl. Chocolate contains theobromine, which can cause nerve damage and even death in dogs. The darker the chocolate, the more concentrated the dose.

- Explain to everyone in your home (including kids) how dangerous treats are to pets.
- Make sure pets can't reach candles, jack-o-lanterns, decorations or ornaments.
- If you notice any symptoms of chocolate toxicity, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Symptoms include:

- Excessive drooling
- Excessive urination
- Pupil dilation
- Rapid heartbeat
- Weakness
- Vomiting and diarrhea
- Hyperactivity
- Muscle tremors and seizures
- Coma