

Cane Toad Toxicity



Cane toads are dangerous amphibians. They are a common cause of poisoning in dogs and, less commonly, in cats. Toads exude a milky white toxin mostly from poison glands behind their eyes and elsewhere on their body. They squeeze this poison onto the surface of their skin when they are under threat. When treated roughly, they can even squirt the poison up to two metres.

Dogs and cats are poisoned when they mouth the toad or sometimes when the toad's poison gets into their eyes.

The toad's poison is also dangerous to humans and deaths have occurred. Some adults have even been affected when they absorbed the poison through cuts in their skin after handling a toad.

Keelback snakes are not susceptible to the venom, and crows and water rats have learnt to turn the toad over and eat only the nonpoisonous internal organs.

Toads were introduced into Australia in 1935 to control the cane beetle - a disastrous move as toads have no natural enemies in Australia. Australian Terriers and Fox Terriers are the breeds most often affected by toad poisoning.

Signs of toad poisoning

You need to know what to look for if your pet is poisoned and what to do.

Due to its corrosive and irritant nature, the toad's venom will cause profuse salivation soon after your pet bites it. Pets affected by the irritant venom will paw their mouth due to the pain. If you see your pet drooling and distressed but haven't seen it attack a toad, look at its gums. If they are red and inflamed, toad poisoning is likely.

Vomiting often occurs, especially in cats. Cats also show hindquarter weakness and a fixed trance-like stare.

If your dog is poisoned, it will usually suffer from seizures or convulsions. These convulsions are often fatal unless you seek urgent veterinary attention. The poison can also affect the heart of dogs and cats, causing immediate cardiac arrest.

How can you protect your pets?

Toads are a nocturnal menace. They regularly poison dogs, such as Terriers and working dogs such as Cattle Dogs, Border Collies and Kelpies due to the strong predatory drive such dogs have. However, any dog can

become excited enough to chase and mouth a toad.

To prevent the problem, allow your dog outside at night only if you are with it. Take it out on a lead if the need arises.

Place two or three bells on your dog's collar. The bells will not affect the toad, but you will learn to recognise the telltale jingling sound the bells make when your dog is 'suspiciously active'. Immediate investigation when the bells are ringing may save your dog's life.

You can train your dog not to attack toads. Each evening, take your dog out on a lead. Wait for the first sign of your dog showing interest in the toad and command it to 'LEAVE' the toad alone. As you issue this command, turn and lead your dog off in the opposite direction for a few steps and praise your dog if it follows you. Return to the toad again and repeat the process as soon as your dog shown any interest in the toad. Stop the session if your dog is getting too excited.

If your pet is poisoned

If you suspect a toad has poisoned your pet, you will have a good chance of saving its life with prompt action.

After it has mouthed a toad, it is vital that you remove all trace of the poison from your pets' teeth and gums.

Using a jet of water from a hose is an effective way of doing this. The water jet should be directed forward out of your pet's mouth, not down into its throat.

Rubbing the teeth and gums with a soft rag containing human toothpaste may also help to remove the toxin.

Transport the dog to your vet as quickly and quietly as possible. Keep your pet cool (as they overheat when convulsing) and gently restrained. If it is convulsing, it can damage itself by knocking against objects and it may not recognise you. It may also become quite vicious. Handle an affected animal with extreme caution.