

# News Release

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **THE TWELVE DANGERS OF WINTER** *CHICAGO EMERGENCY VETERINARIANS WARN* *“WINTER IS A DANGEROUS TIME FOR PETS”*

CHICAGO, Ill., December 21, 2012– Each year, Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center treats more than 11,000 cats and dogs in their emergency room. Many of those visits occur during the winter months and holiday celebrations. Christmas, college football bowl games, New Year’s and other events bring activities that can present a serious danger to pets. The inquisitive nature of cats and a dog’s strong sense of smell cause them to get into decorations, food and sweets that can lead to a frantic visit to the emergency room.

“The holidays are an especially busy time for our emergency room,” said Jerry Klein, DVM, supervising veterinarian of Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center (CVESC). “Pets get into lots of things that may cause injury or make them ill. Christmas is one of our busier days and New Year’s day is even busier.”

Here are some common holiday and winter dangers that can cause your pet a visit to our emergency room.

#### **1. *Chemical Hazards***

Anti-freeze and rock salt are some of the cold weather chemicals that cause problems for pets. Be especially careful of anti-freeze with ethylene glycol, which can be deadly to animals. Rock salt can irritate paw pads and licking or swallowing it can result in

agitation and vomiting. Christmas tree water, with or without additives, can cause stomach upset in cats and dogs.

## **2. *Ugly Christmas Sweaters & Other Costumes***

Pet costumes should allow pets to move freely, breathe easily and bark or meow. There should be no dangling parts for pets to tear off and swallow. If your pet doesn't enjoy dressing up, it's best to let them be themselves over the holidays.

## **3. *Decorations***

Holiday decorations attract curious cats and dogs. If ingested, glitter, "angel hair," ribbons, tinsel, glow sticks and other holiday decorations can cause serious health problems for pets. Cats are especially at risk for ingesting tinsel, ribbon and shiny objects. Be sure to hang treasured ornaments out of the reach of cats and dogs.

## **4. *Food & Beverages***

Stomach upset is the number one reason animals visit our emergency room. Often, the problem is caused by the pet getting into human food. Be especially careful to keep avocado, bones, chocolate, fat trimmings, garlic, grapes, gum, nuts, onion, raisins, stuffing and yeast away from your pets. Human beverages, including alcohol, coffee, soft drinks and tea can also cause illness, poisoning or death for pets. Don't leave unattended drinks within your pet's reach.

## **5. *Freezing Temperatures***

Winter can be difficult for pets. Exposure to cold temperatures for too long can lead to frost-bite or hypothermia. Be sure to monitor your pet's time outdoors. Provide older dogs and those with minimal hair a warm coat when temperatures are below freezing. Outdoor cats and other animals will crawl up under the hood of a car to warm themselves, so be sure to scare them off with a tap on the hood before starting your car.

## **6. *Garbage***

Keep garbage cans covered and secure. Eating leftovers or spoiled food can result in diarrhea, vomiting, listlessness and lack of appetite. In some instances, pets end up with more serious health problems such as pancreatitis, poisoning or blocked intestines. Be

sure your garbage, both inside the house and outside, is secure enough to keep animals out of it.

## **7. *Plants***

Many plants can make pets sick if nibbled or eaten. Dangerous plants include: amaryllis, azaleas, chrysanthemums, evergreens, ivy, juniper, holly, lily and mistletoe. While poinsettias are widely thought to be toxic to dogs and cats, ingestion may cause irritation to the mouth and stomach and result in vomiting, but they are generally considered low in toxicity.

## **8. *Sweet Treats***

Even in small doses, chocolate and sugar-free candy or gum can be poisonous to pets. Dark chocolate and baking chocolate are dangerous. Xylitol, an artificial sweetener found in sugar-free gum and sugar-free candy, is highly toxic to dogs.

## **9. *Visitors***

Ringling doorbells and strangers at the door can be stressful for pets. Keep your pets away from doors leading to the outside, or under control when visitors arrive and depart. Anxious pets often bolt out through open doors. If your pet is overly stressed by holiday visitors, consult with your veterinarian about possible solutions. And make certain your pet has proper identification. A micro-chip and tags on their collar can help quickly identify your pet should it get separated from you.

## **10. *Medications***

With so many visitors this time of the year, it's not unusual for a pet to get into a visitor's unattended purse. We regularly treat pets who have gotten into purses and consumed over-the-counter and prescription medications that were in the purse.

## **11. *Christmas Trees & Evergreens***

Christmas tree water, with or without additives, can cause upset stomach. Evergreen needles, if ingested, can get stuck in your pet's intestines and require surgery to remove.

## **12. Gifts for Pets**

Many people give their pets gifts during the holidays. Make certain the gift is designed for pets and appropriate for your pet in particular. Stuffed animals intended for children are not a good choice for pets as they don't have the extra-sturdy stitching that reduces a pet's ability to tear it apart. Be sure to be careful with wrapping and ribbon.

Another option for a holiday gift for your pet is to give them a gift of good health by scheduling a check-up with your veterinarian and making certain that their vaccinations and heart-worm prevention are up-to-date.

Pet owners who fear their pet has ingested any inappropriate item should immediately contact their veterinarian or Chicago Veterinary and Emergency Specialty Center. Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center is open 24 hours a day, every day, to provide emergency, critical and specialty care to Chicago area cats and dogs. The expert staff and state-of-the-art facility are equipped to handle even the most challenging cases.

### **About Chicago Veterinary Emergency and Specialty Center ([www.ChicagoPetEmergency.com](http://www.ChicagoPetEmergency.com))**

Chicago's oldest and largest pet emergency center, the Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center today provides the most advanced emergency, critical and specialty care available to cats and dogs. Each year, Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center treats more than 11,000 cats and dogs in its emergency room and thousands more see their veterinary specialists.

Staffed by highly-trained specialists and equipped with the latest technology, Chicago Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center is always open – 24 hours each day, every day of the year. In addition to emergency veterinarians and staff, the facility offers board-certified veterinarians who specialize in cardiology, dentistry, dermatology, internal medicine, neurology, oncology, ophthalmology, radiology and surgery to treat pets with special medical or emergency needs. This state-of-the-art facility includes ultrasound and MRI equipment, specialized surgical suites, a blood bank, specialized oxygen cages, heart monitors and more. Since 1978, Chicago

Veterinary Emergency & Specialty Center has been providing care for Chicago-area pets when they need it most.

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