

## **Holiday Safety for Your Pup**

For all pet owners, the holiday season means being extra prepared. So much happens - family and friends get together, the house gets decorated, and doorbells ring with carolers or deliveries. Being prepared for all the bustle includes ensuring your pet's safety and comfort throughout this time. Below are some tips to help you ensure your holiday season is fun and safe for everyone, including your dog - it's amazing what they can get into!

### **Preparing for Visitors and Visiting**

If you have visitors coming into the house - neighbors, co-workers, friends, relatives - some of whom your dog doesn't know or regularly see, it can be more confusing and stressful than you might imagine. Make sure that you're watching your dog during the visit, keeping them safe and comfortable, so that they don't get overwhelmed or over-excited, as this could lead to some bad behaviours that you don't want to see.

We also suggest you keep an eye on your company, as some of the folks coming to your home might not be dog-friendly people. If they aren't, you might have to put your pet in a comfortable, safe space away from the guests. If there are children in the group – especially young ones – be sure to watch your pup to keep everyone safe, perhaps using a leash or a tether around your waist to keep your dog close. There also might be places you'll be invited over the holidays when your pup may need to stay home.

When leaving your pet at home, realize they may find new ways to get into trouble, as there might be ornaments and decorations around at this time of year. Always make sure your dog is secured and well exercised so that, when you leave, they are tired out. I crate my dog and give her a stuffed KONG, something to entertain her while I'm out. Normally she just rests because we've exercised her.

If you are going somewhere overnight, be prepared for your dog too! Bring food, toys, and their crate, bed, or sleeping blanket. If you have puzzle games or things that they like to have fun with - pack them. If it's a new environment, familiarize your dog with it when you get there because it'll be new surroundings, new smells, new everything. Also, don't forget to pack any medications, supplements, or special food – ensure you consider all of your dog's needs.

Size can matter! If and there are disabled or senior people in the home, a tiny dog can get underfoot and potentially trip someone. - you will have to take precautions to keep everyone safe.

### **Deliveries – watch that door!**

With people coming and going and deliveries, the doorbell ringing, knocking at the door, or strange trucks pulling into your driveway, your dogs will get excited and can bark. If you want to curb the barking, you could teach your dog to go to a mat or place, just to focus while people come in and get settled. With in and out traffic, really watch that your dog is safe and can't scoot out the door.

### **Trees and Other Decorations**

Many of us love to entertain and decorate our homes – so, what are some of the things to be prepared for when we have dogs?

When you get your tree - if it's a real tree - watch for the needles as they start to drop, to make sure your dog doesn't ingest them, as they are not good for them. Also, watch your dog does not access water that you put in the base of the tree. That water is not good for your dog either.

In terms of ornaments, if you have a very inquisitive dog or one that's very large, consider what you're putting around the bottom of your tree. Are there things that they can break? Avoid putting things within their reach like popcorn or cranberry strings, which might tempt them to grab at the food and pull; they could literally bring the whole tree down. Many people put little bells on their bottom branches, so they get that warning when anyone is close to the base of the tree. Some people even tether their tree, attaching it to something for extra stability. - Be very conscious of where the electrical wires and cords are so that your dog, if a chewer, can't chew or get tangled in them and, again, potentially hurt themselves or bring the tree down.

Other seasonal decorations are the plants that come into your house. One that's most typical is the poinsettia plant, which is not lethally toxic for your dog. However, if consumed, it can make them extremely ill and will definitely send you to the vet for care! So, try to pick up any leaves or petals that fall from the plant to avoid your dog sniffing around and deciding it's something good to eat. Two toxic plants to be aware of and which must not be accessible to your dog are mistletoe and holly. So, keep them either very high out of the way, or consider not having them in the house at all.

With evergreen garlands and such, as long as your dog can't get to them, and you're picking up any needle droppings, you are safe having them in your house.

### **Scents and Candles**

Going hand in hand with the indoor decor are the scents and fragrances of Christmas that people love, such as scented candles and different oils burning in the house. Keep these high up so your dog can't get to them. If your dog tipped one over and you didn't notice, that could start a fire. Be aware of the type of candle – the quality of it and the ingredients. If you're burning a lot of candles in a smaller enclosed area, they can overwhelm your dogs as well. Your dog's scenting ability is so much more acute than yours and it really can be off-putting and even damaging to them, so please be very careful. If the scented oils are very concentrated, and if they happen to get on your dog's coat or paws and they lick it, it can be very bad for them. A safer alternative are plug-in scents. But again, we would recommend that you check them first for potency and safety. Consider the size of your room and make sure the scent is not too overwhelming for your dog.

### **Festive Food and Drinks**

There is a lot of food around at holiday time. One training tip is to teach the "leave it" command, as it's important when you want them not to touch the charcuterie board, cheese and crackers, nuts and such that are on the table. At dinner, make sure that the dogs aren't begging your guests for food. Some holiday food and treats are toxic to your dog. Those include chocolate, raisins, grapes, macadamia nuts, and sugarless products that contain Xylitol. So, when you're putting out a box of chocolates, make sure that it's nowhere near your pup, because your dog can easily unwrap it with its teeth. And if they eat it, it can make them sick.

Ensure too that your dog can't get into any alcoholic drinks that are being consumed.

Some people love to feed their dogs scraps. The fats from meats and cheeses can be dangerous if they're ingested by your dogs. The bones and fat from ham, turkey and other meats can cause pancreatitis or intestinal blocks, so avoid feeding them to the dog. Also, mesh

wrappers that are on some food items will have tempting smells but can cause bowel obstruction if ingested, and then you've got a trip to the vet! Dogs will also get into trash cans, especially if they can smell that "really good stuff". So, being extra vigilant about everything that you have around when you're entertaining for the holidays is essential.

### ***Baby – it's Cold Outside...***

Winter in Canada can get very cold outside. Your dog is susceptible to both hypothermia and frostbite - even though they have a winter coat, they can still freeze. Especially their ears as they are, essentially, exposed skin. So, consider that if you're cold - your dog is going to also be cold. And that means your walk should be shorter and you should be monitoring them. If you have, what we call a "winter dog", say a Malamute or a Husky, and they love being outside, you still need to monitor them. When your dog is outside, monitor how much snow they eat. They might be thirsty, or they might like just picking it up in their mouth because it'll melt. If they eat too much snow, they can get hypothermia because their insides get too cold.

De-icers and antifreeze come out when it's cold. The de-icers that are used on your driveway and walkway could be a danger to your dog, depending on what's being used. There are pet-safe de-icers. If it's not pet-safe, then your dog's feet can get burned by it. Be sure to wipe your pet's feet when they come indoors. If you see them lifting their paw, it could be what they're walking on isn't comfortable, or it could be snowballs. Snowballs occur when the fur in between their pads gets clumped up and then, suddenly, they can't walk because they've got these big, frozen snowballs on their feet. Make sure that you're keeping their feet clear, safe, and clean.

Antifreeze is highly toxic to pets, and it's something that is in all of our cars. Keep it away from your dog, very high up, because it's very sweet tasting and tempting. If they can get to it, they will want to consume it like they consume water. Once it's digested, it can affect their kidneys and could be fatal. Watch that there's no leaked antifreeze on the floor in your garage or driveway. Because, again, when you're taking your dog for a walk past these spills, they can get into it if you're not watching them carefully. Symptoms of antifreeze poisoning are vomiting, excessive urination, drinking, or even being very lethargic and depressed.

In this article I have provided you with several things to help you be prepared and make a plan for your holiday season. I encourage you to think about your holiday activities, whether you're entertaining at your own home, or you're going to visit other people. Make a plan and prepare to avoid anything that can harm your dog. But most of all, be safe, have fun, and enjoy the festive season. We want you and your pup to have a great time!



Corey McCusker, CPDT-KA, is the founder of Muttz with Mannerz Canine Academy located in Stouffville. In addition, Corey is an evaluator for St John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program and created the first Kids & K9 Camp in Canada.