

Halloween pet hazards: What you need to know

By Peter Lopatin for WebVet



Halloween is a festive day -- and night -- for children, and a hectic one for adults: there are the decorations, the candy, pumpkin carving, crowds of trick-or-treaters to be lavished with seasonal treats, and generally good-natured mayhem.

But for the family pet, there are some Halloween hazards to be aware of. Here's our list of the top five, with suggestions on how to keep your Halloween celebration pet-safe and pet-friendly.

Halloween hazard #1: Chocolate

With chocolate bars and other chocolate-based treats in abundance, it's easy to forget that **chocolate** (<http://www.webvet.com/main/article?id=1870>) is toxic to pets. It contains a compound called *theobromine*. If enough is ingested, your animal can suffer from **vomiting** (<http://www.webvet.com/main/article/id/236/med/1>), **diarrhea** (<http://www.webvet.com/main/article/id/238/med/1>), abnormal heart rhythms, tremors, **seizures** (<http://www.webvet.com/main/article?id=88&med=1>), and possible death.

If you keep a 'goodies basket' by the front door for trick-or-treaters, make sure your pet doesn't run off with any 'samples' for itself.

Halloween hazard #2: Decorations

Halloween decorations have evolved from paper cutouts hung in the window to elaborate -- even lavish -- outdoor displays. Sometimes, the materials used can be dangerously attractive for pets. Small, low-hanging decorations on trees and shrubbery can tempt some pets to take a nibble, resulting in intestinal blockages.

Halloween hazard #3: Dangerous foods

Many common **foods that are dangerous to pets** (<http://www.webvet.com/main/article?id=1870>) may be more plentiful on Halloween because they are popular in common trick-or-treat goodies. In addition to chocolate, these include nuts, raisins, chewing gum, mints, and anything containing *xylitol*, a commonly used artificial sweetener. Xylitol -- often found in baked goods and candies -- has been associated with liver failure and death in dogs.

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Halloween hazard #4: Anxiety & stress

Some pets enjoy the excitement of crowds and are eager to join in the fun. If your dog is a party animal, then by all means take it along trick-or-treating. But many dogs -- and certainly most cats -- become frightened or even uncharacteristically aggressive in crowds. If your pet belongs to the latter group, Halloween may be a good time to put it in a quiet room with food and water, away from all the hubbub.

Halloween hazard #5: Escape artists

With trick-or-treaters coming and going every few minutes, leaving the door open is a welcoming thing to do. But it can be a bit too tempting for a pet that just feels like "stepping out" for the evening. So keep a close eye on your pet to prevent any escapes.

You should also make sure that your pet is always wearing some kind of identification, just in case: **microchipping** (<http://www.webvet.com/main/article?id=188&med=1>) is ideal; but at the very least, make sure your pet is wearing an identification or rabies tag with your contact information.

For children - and, let's face it, plenty of adults -- Halloween festivities are an eagerly awaited time of shared fun and frolic. Keeping in mind these five pet perils will go a long way to making sure your Halloween memories are all pleasant ones.

Credit: Reviewed by John A. Bukowski, DVM, MPH, PhD and Susan E. Aiello, DVM, ELS