Press release template:
Christmas hazards

You can tailor this press release using regional survey statistics and local details in order to promote your own practice and services to your local media.

Regional statistics showing the percentage of vets that have seen cases of toxic ingestion in pets are displayed at the end of this document.

Template

[Your practice name]

For immediate release

Contact: [Name of practice contact to deal with press enquiries, with phone number and email]

[Local area/vet practice name] vets warn pet owners of perils beneath the Christmas tree

[Name of your practice and location of practice eg. Nice Vets in Highbury, London] is urging pet owners to watch out for potential hazards to their pets this Christmas, as findings released by the British Veterinary Association (BVA) reveal that in [regional area], [your regional area statistic from list]% of vets saw at least one case of toxic ingestion in pets during the 2015 festive period.

Across the UK, chocolate poisoning in dogs was the most common cause of toxic ingestion at Christmas, with 73% of vets seeing at least one case. Several vets in BVA’s ‘Voice of the Veterinary Profession’ survey said that, despite owners’ best intentions, their pets had been poisoned after gifts containing chocolate were placed under the Christmas tree with the owner unaware of the potential peril for their pet lurking beneath the wrapping. Many cats
also suffered toxic ingestion last Christmas, with a quarter of vets treating cats for antifreeze poisoning.

[Name, job title,] from [practice name] said:

[Insert practice quote here, highlighting the message you really want to get across. Include – after clear permission from owner – any case studies from your own practice. And don’t forget to tell local people to visit their local vet if in doubt/need of advice]

British Veterinary Association President Gudrun Ravetz, said:

“Christmas is typically a fun and chaotic time, with presents and treats often arriving in our homes. Many pet owners are aware of the risks of chocolate poisoning to their pets but, as our survey shows, it’s easy to be caught out by a kind gift left under the tree which curious animals can find hard to resist. Our advice is for givers to tell, and owners to ask, if there is anything edible in gifts. If you suspect your pet may have eaten something they shouldn’t then don’t delay in contacting your local vet.”

To keep Christmas merry for the whole household, [your practice] vets is urging animal-lovers to ensure their home is safe for four-legged friends by following these five simple tips:

1. Protect your pet from poisons – a number of festive treats and traditions, such as chocolate, raisins, xylitol (found in sugar free treats), nuts, grapes, liquorice, poinsettia, holly and mistletoe are toxic to cats and dogs.

2. Keep decorations out of reach – ribbons, wrapping paper, baubles, tinsel and tree lights can all prove irresistible to cats and dogs but can be very dangerous if broken, chewed or swallowed. Batteries for Christmas gifts also need to be kept safe as, if ingested, they may cause severe chemical burns to the mouth, throat and stomach.

3. Forget festive food for pets – we all enjoy a richer diet over Christmas, but fatty foods and Christmas dinners shouldn’t be shared. They can trigger, sickness and diarrhoea or other conditions from gastroenteritis to pancreatitis, so try to stick to your pet’s regular diet and routine. Bones including turkey bones should not be given to pets as they can splinter and puncture the digestive tract.

4. Give toys not treats – we all want our pets to share the fun and many of us include a gift for our pet on the shopping list. But too many treats can lead to fat pets which can have serious consequences for their health, so consider opting for a new toy, or a long walk if you want to indulge your pet this Christmas.
5. Know where to go – even with all the care in the world, animal accidents and emergencies can still happen. Make sure you’re prepared by checking your vet’s emergency cover provision and holiday opening hours or, if you are away from home, use the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons’ Find a Vet facility at www.findavet.org.uk


ENDS/

Notes for editors

1. [practice name] was set up by [founder’s name] [number of years since founding] years ago and is situated at [practice address]

2. BVA is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the UK. We represent the views of over 16,000 members on animal health and welfare, and veterinary policy issues to government, parliamentarians and key influencers in the UK and EU.

3. Substances which can be poisonous to pets include:
   • Chocolate and liquorice (common Christmas gifts)
   • Raisins and sultanas (used in Christmas cake recipes)
   • Certain nuts (especially peanuts and Macadamia nuts)
   • Xylitol-sweetened foods
   • Onions, avocados and grapes
   • Alcohol
   • Plants including lilies (and daffodils)
   • Cleaning and DIY products such as white spirit and lubricating oils
   • Car anti-freeze
   • Human medicines

4. Substances with low toxicity that could cause drooling, vomiting or diarrhoea include:
   • Blu-tack or other similar adhesives (used to put up decorations)
   • Charcoal and coal
   • Cut-flower and houseplant food
• Expanded polystyrene foam (used for large present packing)
• Holly, mistletoe and poinsettia (common Christmas plants/decorations)
• Matches
• Wax candles and crayons
• Silica gel (found in packaging)

5. The Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) is BVA’s animal welfare charity committed to improving the welfare of all animals through science, education and debate: their Pets and Poisons leaflet can be downloaded at: www.bva-awf.org.uk/pet-care-advice/pets-and-poisons or copies can be ordered for practice waiting rooms by emailing bva-awf@bva.co.uk

6. The Veterinary Poisons Information Service (VPIS) provides 24-hour advice for veterinary professionals on the diagnosis and management of poisoned animals. This service is available throughout the festive period

7. For more information, please contact [practice contact details].

Voice of the Veterinary Profession: regional Christmas hazards statistics

The first Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey following Christmas last year (February 2016) asked companion animal vets if they saw any cases of toxic ingestion in companion animals over the festive period 2015.

On average across the UK 80% of vets had seen cases of toxic ingestion.

The regional results in England by percentage of vets who had seen any cases of toxic ingestion were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
West Midlands 90%
Yorkshire and the Humber 78%
North East 73%
North West 78%
South East 82%
South West 80%

The results in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were as follows:

Northern Ireland 100%
Scotland 77%
Wales 72%