Antifreeze (ethylene glycol) poisoning

Overview

EMERGENCY
Contact your vet straight away if you think your pet has come into contact with antifreeze.

Antifreeze (ethylene glycol) is a very common poison in dogs and cats. It’s a very toxic substance so even a small amount can do a lot of damage to several vital organs. Unfortunately, anti-freeze poisoning is often fatal.

It can be difficult to diagnose and treat and preventing your pets coming into contact with antifreeze (especially with cats) isn’t easy.
Why is antifreeze poisonous?

Antifreeze is a common ingredient used in products such as vehicle screen wash, brake fluid and radiator fluid. Antifreeze is extremely toxic to cats and dogs.

Even a small amount of antifreeze can cause kidney failure and serious damage to the nervous system. Sadly, due to the severe effects it has on the body, antifreeze poisoning is often fatal.

Unfortunately, a lot of anti-freeze products taste sweet which is why our pets are often tempted to drink them. Leaky car radiators and antifreeze fluid spilt on roads and driveways pose a big danger to our pets.

Antifreeze is more dangerous for cats than dogs as it takes a smaller amount to cause a major problem.

Symptoms

Antifreeze is absorbed into the system very quickly. It attacks the nerves, heart, lungs and the kidneys.

Common symptoms include:

- Twitchy muscles
• Twitchy eyes
• Low energy (lethargy)
• Vomiting
• Drinking more than usual
• Unsteadiness
• Seizures (fits)
• Fast, panty breathing
• Collapse

When to contact your vet

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Contact your vet straight away if you think your pet has come into contact with antifreeze.

You know your pet best. If they don’t have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it’s always best to contact your vet.

Treatment

Antifreeze poisoning is very dangerous, the sooner your pet gets treatment the better their chance of surviving.

Your pet will need to be admitted to the veterinary hospital and treatment may include:

• Stomach emptying (only helps in the very early stages of poisoning)
• Specific medicine to stop the effects of antifreeze
• A drip – to give lifesaving fluids

Unfortunately, antifreeze is very poisonous, a high proportion of poisoned dogs and an even higher proportion of poisoned cats will not survive.

Outlook

Antifreeze poisoning is unfortunately often fatal. Your pet may need to spend several days in the veterinary hospital. If they have been lucky enough to survive, your vet will send them home once they are over the worst of the poisoning, but sometimes pets can seem to improve and then get much worse again. It may take time for your pet to fully recover and they may be at risk of developing chronic kidney disease later in life.

Prevention

It’s impossible to stop free-roaming cats finding antifreeze spills when they are out and about but you can make sure to clean up any anti-freeze spillages in your own area immediately. Avoid letting your dog roam near parked cars, instead exercise them away from streets and car parks.

Fortunately, more modern, antifreeze products tend to be safer and don’t contain ethylene glycol. Some companies have started adding a bitter taste to their antifreeze to discourage pets from drinking it.

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