

Heavy rain, flooding, mudslides, and power outages; what more does Mother Nature have in store for us? Well, how about wild mushrooms! Some of these fabulous wild fungi can be a really big problem for anyone who eats them; including the family dog. This is the time of year we see mushrooms sprout seemingly overnight. Some are harmless, while some are deadly; telling the difference is left only to the experts.

The true incidence of toxic wild mushroom ingestion in dogs is not known. This fact is largely due to the non-specific symptoms of mushroom toxicity (see below). If no one witnesses the dog eating mushrooms, it may not even be suspected until it's too late.

When a dog eats toxic mushrooms the initial symptoms can be abdominal pain, vomiting, and bloody diarrhea. These symptoms can occur within a few hours of ingestion, but may actually subside within 2-3 days. The second stage of the toxicity is much more dangerous. Severe liver failure in this second phase can cause loss of appetite, bleeding tendencies, depression and coma. Not to be left out, the kidneys can fail as well. Make no mistake about it, mushroom poisoning can be a potentially devastating problem.

There are no specific antidotes for toxic wild mushroom ingestion. The degree of toxicity, and the likelihood of recovery, depends on many factors but the amount of mushrooms eaten is a major player. Additionally, if the pet has timely access to veterinary care after ingestion (ideally within 1-2 hours after ingestion), some steps can be taken to lessen the amount of toxin absorbed by the intestinal tract, which can dramatically improve the odds of survival.

Remember that these dogs that come to a veterinary hospital don't have "mushroom poisoning" tattooed on their foreheads. The symptoms mentioned above are common to many illnesses. Unless the pet owner witnesses their dog eating mushrooms or finds mushrooms in the dog vomitus, most of these patients are treated with general supportive measures based on the symptoms they present with. This usually includes hospitalization for intravenous fluids and monitoring of organ function. Once the liver is damaged, there may be little that can be done-short of a liver transplant. The last time I checked, liver transplants were not available for dogs-at least not yet.

If you see your dog eating mushrooms, or even if you suspect it, you should immediately contact your veterinarian. Time is critical here, and hour or two may be the difference between your dog surviving or not. When you go the veterinary hospital, bring with you any material your dog might have already vomited, as this may reveal some mushroom remnants that may guide the doctor's treatments during those critical first few hours.

Of course it's a lot easier to prevent mushroom ingestion. Don't let your dog have access to areas where mushrooms may be cropping up (open space, some public parks, etc). Monitor your yard closely this time of year, especially under trees such as oaks and birches, as these are common places to find mushrooms. Carefully remove and dispose of any mushrooms you may find in your yard. Unless you are an expert in identifying mushroom types, assume all mushrooms are poisonous.

If the events of recent weeks are any indication, Mother Nature sure knows how to get our attention. Just don't forget to pay attention to some of the things that may be sprouting in your own back yard.

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