

## Tips to keep your pets safe this holiday season

The holiday season is a time for fun with family and friends, but Pinellas County Animal Services reminds members of the community not to forget your pets at this time of year.

- Securely anchor your Christmas tree so it doesn't tip and fall, causing possible injury to your pet. This will also prevent the tree water—which may contain fertilizers that can cause stomach upset—from spilling. Stagnant tree water is a breeding ground for bacteria and your pet could end up with nausea or diarrhea if consumed.
- Kitties love tinsel—a sparkly, light-catching “toy” that's easy to bat around and carry in their mouths. But a nibble can lead to a swallow, which can lead to an obstructed digestive tract, severe vomiting, dehydration and possible surgery. It's best to brighten your holidays with something other than tinsel.
- Do not feed your pets chocolate or anything sweetened with xylitol. Make sure to keep your pets away from the table and unattended food—be sure to secure the lids on garbage cans.
- Chose holiday gifts for your pets that are safe—dogs can tear apart toys and swallow the pieces that can become lodged in the esophagus, stomach or intestines. Stick with chew toys that are indestructible. Cats are attracted to toys with long stringy objects like yarn, ribbon or small moving parts, but they may get stuck in the intestines, often requiring surgery. Surprise your kitty with a new ball that's too big to swallow, a stuffed catnip toy or an interactive cat dancer.
- Forget the holly and mistletoe. Holly, when ingested, can cause pets to suffer nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Mistletoe can cause gastrointestinal upset and cardiovascular problems. Many varieties of lilies can cause kidney failure if ingested.
- Hold the leftovers. Fatty, spicy and other human foods, as well as bones, should not be fed to your furry friends.
- Don't leave lighted candles unattended. Pets may burn themselves or cause a fire if they knock candles over. Be sure to use appropriate candle holders, placed on a stable surface. If you leave the room, put the candle out.
- Keep wires, batteries and glass or plastic ornaments out of paws' reach. A wire can deliver a potentially lethal electrical shock and a punctured battery can cause burns to the mouth and esophagus, while shards of breakable ornaments can damage your pet's mouth.
- If your animal-loving guests would like to give your pets a little extra attention and exercise while you're busy tending to the party, ask them to feel free to start a nice play or petting session.
- Make sure all of your medications are locked behind secure doors and be sure to tell your guests to keep their meds zipped up and packed away.
- If your celebration includes adult holiday beverages, be sure to place your unattended alcoholic drinks where pets cannot get them. If ingested, your pet could become weak, ill and may even go into a coma, possibly resulting in death from respiratory failure.
- Give your pet their own quiet space to retreat to—complete with fresh water and a place to snuggle. Shy pups and cats might want to hide out under a piece of furniture, in their carrier or in a separate room away from the excitement.
- As you count down to the new year please keep in mind that strings of thrown confetti can get lodged in a cat's intestine, if ingested, requiring surgery. Noisy poppers and fireworks can terrify pets and cause possible damage to sensitive ears.