

What you should know about Tea Tree Oil toxicity in dogs

The following articles highlight the problems that Tea Tree Oil can cause if not used properly

ARTICLE 1

Have you used or contemplated using tea tree oil to treat a problem in one of your pets? If so, you may be interested to know that recent reports have linked the substance to toxicity in dogs and cats. Used without ample caution, tea tree oil can cause your pet much more harm than good.

A Popular Treatment

Tea tree oil, also known as melaleuca oil, is produced from freshly harvested leaves of *Melaleuca alternifolia*, or the tea tree, which grows in Portugal, Spain and Australia, as well as Florida and other parts of the southern United States. Tea tree oil is a popular over-the-counter treatment thought to kill bacteria and fungi. It is used for a variety of skin maladies in people, including fungal infections, acne, boils, burns, corns and insect bites. The oil also is sometimes added to bath water or vaporizers to treat respiratory disorders. It is sold in lotions, soaps, toothpastes and skin creams and is sometimes used in products marketed as cleansers or insect repellents.

In recent years, herbal and other alternative therapies have become more popular in veterinary medicine. Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that some of the medicinal uses of tea tree oil have been extrapolated to animals. Tea tree oil products have been used by vets and owners to treat skin diseases in dogs and cats, predominantly hot spots and skin allergies. But caution is called for when using the product in pets.

Reports of Adverse Reactions

Most people tolerate the application of undiluted, 100 percent tea tree oil without any problems. The same is not true for animals. A report in the January 2014 issue of Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association documents multiple cases of tea tree oil toxicity in dogs and cats. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' Animal Poison Control Center database was the source of the information, which spans a 10-year period from 2002 to 2012.

The poison control center data include 337 dogs and 106 cats exposed to 100 percent tea tree oil, administered to the skin, orally or via both methods. Of the 443 animals exposed, 343 (77 percent) developed an adverse reaction consistent with toxicity. Their symptoms developed within two to 12 hours following exposure and lasted up to three days. The abnormalities most commonly reported were depression, lethargy, weakness, incoordination, muscle tremors and increased salivation or drooling. Less common symptoms included vomiting, skin rashes, collapse and coma. Several animals were documented to have elevated liver enzymes. Young cats and smaller adult cats were at greater risk for the development of more severe symptoms. Unfortunately, information documenting outcomes — how the pets fared after exposure — was, for the most part, unavailable.

www.vetstreet.com

ARTICLE 2

Fleas are itchy and uncomfortable for our pets, but they are easily preventable. Options to protect your pet from fleas include collars, topical treatments, and chewable tablets. Nowadays, some of these preventatives last as long as 12 weeks.

Some pet parents opt to use natural topical flea treatments, such as tea tree oil. However, tea tree oil can be toxic for pets if ingested or used improperly. Your veterinarian can help you decide what's right for you and your pet.

Is tea tree oil safe as a topical flea treatment?

Home remedies for fleas are generally inadvisable for both safety and efficacy reasons. Commercially available flea treatments from your veterinarian are safety tested under strict conditions. In addition, they are proven to be effective at preventing and killing fleas. Essential oils and extracts like tea tree, eucalyptus, and citronella do not require testing for safety or efficacy, nor are the contents of the bottle regulated. That means you may not get what you are paying for, and have no guarantee that it will work.

But can tea tree oil kill and repel fleas?

When diluted and used safely, tea tree oil can kill and repel fleas. But it is among the herbal treatments listed as “especially risky” in the Merck Veterinary Manual. This is because tea tree oil is difficult to dilute properly in home kitchens.

Commercially available formulas for pets contain only 0.1 to 1 percent tea tree oil. Even if you measure everything precisely and shake the bottle before spraying it on your dog’s coat, it is easy to apply more than intended. If your cat or dog licks the oil off, which pets tend to do as they groom, your pet could get very sick.

Store-bought shampoos containing tea tree oil have very small amounts of tea tree oil. The product is formulated so that the oil is evenly distributed, reducing the toxic risk to pets.

www.petmd.com

ARTICLE 3

Story at-a-glance

- Tea tree oil is derived from the *Melaleuca alternifolia* plant, found in Australia and other subtropical regions. It’s used in humans to treat such skin conditions as stings and bites, cuts or burns and for microbial infections.
- Tea tree oil also is used to effectively treat similar maladies in pets, but recent reports indicate it can be harmful to dogs and cats if used at 100 percent strength.
- After full-strength tea tree oil treatment, studies indicate symptoms in dogs and cats can range from depression and weakness to vomiting and collapse.
- As with any other type of food or treatment, correct handling and use of tea tree oil is not only recommended but also vital. The recommended dilution ratio is 0.1-1.0 percent strength in a topical application, not oral. Full strength tea tree oil should never be used on pets.
- This wonderful essential oil has many medical applications for dogs, but must be appropriately diluted to be used safely and effectively.

Tea tree oil is used as a treatment for a myriad of human maladies, such as bites, stings and burns, and in bath and vapor treatments for respiratory discomfort. It is also useful as an antimicrobial for fungal infections, and popular as an ingredient in everything from lotions to toothpaste.

Sometimes called melaleuca oil, tea tree oil is extracted from the leaves of *Melaleuca alternifolia* trees, found in subtropical climates, especially Australia, but it also grows well in Spain, Portugal and some of the southernmost regions of the U.S.

Tea Tree Oil for Dogs and Cats Potentially Toxic

The healing properties of tea tree oil for pets have been reported in the treatment of skin irritations, drug allergies, and environmental allergies. Wounds and hot spots, which are painful, infected skin sores, can also be treated with a topical solution made from manuka honey, derived from the tea tree plant.

While it's true tea tree oil has shown effectiveness for humans, and most people handle undiluted exposure without any problem, its safety for animals is another story.

Recently, warnings have emerged regarding the use of tea tree oil for pets. In January of this year, a *Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association* report¹ listed numerous instances of tea tree oil toxicity in dogs and cats from 10 years of incident data from the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center database. According to the study:

"Tea tree, or Melaleuca alternifolia oil, does have toxic potential, depending on the circumstances of exposure. Clinical effects that may occur following dermal exposure to significant amounts of tea tree oil include loss of coordination, muscle weakness, depression, and possibly even a severe drop in body temperature, collapse and liver damage. If the oil is ingested, potential effects include vomiting, diarrhea and, in some cases, seizures. If inhalation of the oil occurs, aspiration pneumonia is possible.

"When it comes to flea control, we always recommend that pet owners consult with their veterinarian to get advice on the proper product to use, based on the individual pet's species, age, size and health history. Additionally, reading the label first and following the product's directions exactly are key in helping to avoid any potentially problematic situation."

The study involved oral and/or skin exposure of 100 percent tea tree oil to 337 dogs and 106 cats, reporting that "of the 443 animals exposed, 343 (77 percent) developed an adverse reaction consistent with toxicity." Toxicity symptoms appeared within 2 to 12 hours and lasted up to three days. Negative reactions included:

- Depression
- Weakness
- Lack of coordination
- Muscle tremors
- Increased salivation (drooling)

Other noted symptoms included skin rashes, elevated liver enzymes and vomiting. A few animals collapsed or became comatose. Small adult cats and kittens showed higher risk. Outcomes for the animals in the study were unavailable since Poison Control Center records were obtained from phone calls made when the symptoms appeared.

The Key to Effective, Safe Tea Tree Oil Use

Research shows tea tree oil is safe for dogs and cats and effective only when it is diluted correctly – i.e., diluted in large amounts of water. The recommended ratio is 0.1-1.0 percent strength, to be dispensed topically. Oral application is not safe for your pet.

<https://healthypets.mercola.com>

ARTICLE 4

What is Tea Tree Oil Poisoning?

Tea tree oil is derived from the Melaleuca alternifolia tree. The leaves of the tree, which is readily found in Australia and other subtropical climates, produces the oil that is used quite readily in various infections in

skin disorders. People use tea tree oil to treat nail fungus, athlete's foot, allergic reactions on the skin, stings, bites and other conditions. It is a topical solution; it should never be taken orally.

Tea tree oil poisoning in dogs may occur when dogs consume this potentially toxic oil. Tea tree oil is also used to help with parasites. Many dog owners have used tea tree oil on their dog's skin to prevent the infestation of fleas and ticks. There are some sources that say tea tree oil, when diluted properly, is safe to use; however, it is important to always consult with your veterinarian when wanting to use any type of holistic approach, such as any essential oil, to keep your dog free of parasites or for other maladies. Even in certain shampoos and your cleansers for dogs, very small amounts of tea tree oil may be an ingredient. If tea tree oil in diluted form in these products is used on your dog, it is important to be sure your dog does not lick his fur immediately after use.

Tea tree oil poisoning in dogs is a result of a dog orally ingesting tea tree oil in copious amounts or in concentrated form. Tea tree oil poisoning in dogs, while treatable, can be mild to severe and can cause harsh symptoms, including organ damage.

Symptoms of Tea Tree Oil Poisoning in Dogs

Depending on how much tea tree oil is ingested, it can have detrimental effects on a dog.

Symptoms of tea tree oil poisoning are:

- Muscle weakness
- Loss of coordination
- Vomiting
- Drop in body temperature
- Drooling
- Collapse Depression
- Skin rashes
- Seizures (in severe cases) Pneumonia (from inhalation)

Causes of Tea Tree Oil Poisoning in Dogs

The cause of tea tree oil poisoning in dogs is due to the ingestion of tea tree oil. This usually occurs when the tea tree oil is applied to the dog's fur or skin and is licked by the dog. Tea tree oil should only be used in certain diluted quantities and only under the supervision of your veterinarian. Causes of sickness include: The rapid absorption of the chemicals into the skin, causing burns or rashes The rapid absorption of the chemicals if taken orally, causing burns or mouth ulcers The chemicals of the essential oils are metabolized through the liver

Diagnosis of Tea Tree Oil Poisoning in Dogs

As with any essential oil ingestion by dogs, is important to receive rapid treatment. The quicker you can get your dog to the veterinarian will prevent your loved one from developing severe toxic effects. Your veterinarian will ask questions pertaining to how much tea tree oil your dog consumed and he will also want to know how much time has passed since he ingested this essential oil. The veterinarian will begin to treat your dog immediately based on his symptoms.

Blood work will be performed in order to take a closer look at the liver and kidneys and to see if they are functioning properly. A biochemistry profile will also alert the veterinarian to organ function. Based on his clinical signs and on your history of usage of tea tree oil on your dog's skin, a diagnosis will be made and treatment will begin.

Treatment of Tea Tree Oil Poisoning in Dogs

Treatment will depend on the severity of the toxicity in the clinical signs that your dog possesses. Treatment methods of tea tree oil poisoning may include: Intravenous Fluids IV fluids will be given to hydrate your dog so he may respond better to treatment. IV fluids given to the dog also encourage urination.

Medications

The veterinarian will choose which medications to give to your dog. Anti-vomiting medications may be given to prevent aspiration, medications may be given to protect the liver and stomach, and antibiotics may be given. Every dog is different, and every toxic dosage will vary, depending on the quantity of dilution in the amount ingested.

Recovery of Tea Tree Oil Poisoning in Dogs

With rapid and proper treatment, your dog has a good chance of recovery. Once you take your dog home from the veterinarian or animal hospital, it will be important to keep an eye on your loved one for any behavioral changes or new symptoms. The veterinarian will give you instructions on how to continue caring for your dog, and how to administer any medications. Your veterinarian may want to see your dog again so he can continue to monitor his progress. If you have any questions or concerns once you are home with your dog, it is very important to contact your veterinarian. For prevention, keeping tea tree oil (and all essential oils) away from your dog is very important. Always consult your veterinarian if you choose to use any type of holistic treatments in the form of essential oils for any of your dog's ailments.

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