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Give Your Dog a Bone? Not a Good Idea

Secondhand smoke also a serious health hazard for pets

By Lisa Wade McCormick
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Remember the line from the kids song “This Old Man” that says give your dog a bone? It turns out that’s not such a good idea. Nor is smoking around your pet.

The [Food and Drug Administration](#) (FDA) warns pet owners that giving your dog a bone can cause serious injuries or even death. Meanwhile, the [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#) (ASPCA) is warning pet owners not to smoke around their dogs and cats.

“Some people think it’s safe to give dogs large bones, like those from a ham or a roast,” said Carmela Stamper, a veterinarian in the Center for Veterinary Medicine at the FDA. “Bones are unsafe no matter what their size. Giving your dog a bone may make your pet a candidate for a trip to your veterinarian’s office later, possible emergency surgery, or even death.”

The FDA cited 10 reasons why bones are risky for dogs:

- They can break teeth;
- They can cause mouth or tongue injuries;
- They can become looped around a dog’s lower jaw. This can be frightening or painful for a dog and may require a trip to the vet’s office;
- They can get stuck in a dog’s esophagus;
- They can get stuck in a dog’s windpipe, which can cause serious breathing problems;
- They can get stuck in a dog’s stomach and, depending on the size of the bone, may require surgery to remove;
- They can get stuck in a dog’s intestines. This can cause a blockage and may require surgery
- Bone fragments can cause constipation;
- Bones can cause severe bleeding from the dog’s rectum;
- Bones can cause peritonitis, a worrisome bacterial infection of the abdomen that happens when bone fragments poke holes in a dog’s stomach or intestines. The FDA said peritonitis can kill a dog and must be immediately treated.



“Talk with your veterinarian about alternatives to giving bones to your dog,” Dr. Stamper says. “There are many bone-like products made with materials that are safe for dogs to chew on.”

She also reminded pet owners to always supervise dogs when they have any chew products. “And always, if your dog ‘just isn’t acting right,’ call your veterinarian right away.”

Secondhand smoke

And as for secondhand smoke, the ASPCA says that a growing body of research – including the Surgeon General’s Report – shows there are no safe levels of exposure to secondhand smoke for humans and for animals.

Studies show that an estimated 50,000 Americans die from secondhand smoke (secondhand smoke) each year and 4 million youth are exposed to it in their homes, according to the ASPCA.

“A number of studies have indicated that animals, too, face health risks when exposed to the toxins in secondhand smoke, from respiratory problems to allergies and even cancer,” the group said.

Toxins from secondhand smoke can cause lung and nasal cancer in dogs, the ASPCA said. It can also cause malignant lymphoma in cats and allergy and respiratory problems in other pets.

“One recent study shows that nearly 30 percent of pets live with at least one smoker – a number far too high given the consequences of exposure to secondhand smoke,” the ASPCA said.

To address this problem, the ASPCA and the [American Legacy Foundation](#) have joined forces to urge pet owners to “kick the habit” or at least smoke outside -- away from their animals.

The Washington D.C.-based Legacy Foundation develops programs to address the health effects of tobacco and says its mission is to build a world “where young people reject tobacco and anyone can quit.”

“While most Americans have been educated about the dangers of smoking to their own bodies and their children’s, it is equally important that pet owners take action to protect their beloved companion animals from the dangers of secondhand smoke,” said Dr. Cheryl G. Heaton, president and CEO of the Legacy Foundation.

The ASPCA said secondhand smoke isn’t the only danger pets face from exposure to tobacco products.

“Nicotine — found in cigarettes and other tobacco products — is also highly toxic to animals if ingested,” said Mindy Bough, vice-president of ASPCA Animal Poison Control “A dog that accidentally eats tobacco may develop weakness, decreased breathing rate, and could possibly die. The ASPCA strongly recommends keeping your pet away from tobacco as well as secondhand smoke.”

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