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PEST POISONS AFFECT OUR PETS, TOO

By Dr. Mona Miller, DVM

Baits and poisons that we use to kill common garden pests can severely affect our beloved pets as well. I write a lot about chemical hazards that dogs (and rarely cats) can get into, and in part it's because I believe these are preventable problems. The two that I'd like to cover in this article are rat bait and snail bait. Both are commonly used baits that can cause death in the dogs, cats and other animals that ingest these... and the scary part is that it doesn't take a large amount of either to create a big problem. Both are treatable problems and clearly the sooner treatment is started, the better the chance of survival.

Rat/rodent bait is usually a warfarin compound (brodifacoum) that causes inability to clot blood in the animal ingesting it. This is how the rat dies - it takes from two to seven days to take effect, and the effect is progressive internal bleeding, into any part of the body. It is not specific for rats - any dog, cat or other mammal will suffer the same effect. The bleeding can occur in the chest or belly cavity, joints, gastrointestinal tract or in the skin. If you know that your dog has just ingested rat bait (even a tiny amount), it is best to induce vomiting right away and monitor his clotting ability with a special blood test. If your dog has eaten rat bait but you are not aware of it, and he is showing signs of illness a couple days later, treatment can still be administered. Vitamin K is the antidote for this poison - an initial injection can be given, then a few weeks of capsules given at home. Blood tests are used to monitor the severity of the initial problem and the length of time Vitamin K needs to be given (the average is about three weeks). In some instances, a blood transfusion may be necessary at the time of diagnosis to provide a "band aid" of clotting proteins in the first 24-36 hours before Vitamin K becomes effective.

Snail/slug bait (containing metaldehyde) causes a "shake and bake" syndrome - muscle twitching that progress to seizures and high body temperature. This takes only 30 minutes to a couple hours to take effect, and the symptoms can progress rapidly. There is no specific antidote, but treatment is available to control the tremors and seizures, cool the body down and bind whatever toxin may be left in the body. Successful treatment involves hospitalization and often 24-hour care for up to four days.

As with any suspected chemical ingestion, it is best to contact your veterinarian right away, and bring the box with you to the appointment if you suspect your dog has eaten either of these poisons.



Dr. Mona S. Miller lives in Lafayette with her 4 year old son, yellow Labrador Retriever and grey cat. She has worked at Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Lafayette since moving here in 2001. She attended Cal as an undergrad, and received her DVM from U.C. Davis. She can be reached at Four Seasons, 938-7700, or by email to MonaSDVM@aol.com.

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