

Safety Tips for Hunting Dogs

Hunting season is fast approaching - Tips from Pet Poison Helpline to help keep your dog safe!

As you and your retriever, setter, spaniel, pointer, or other hunting dog prepare for hunting season, it's important to make sure that you're keeping your dog out of harm's way. Be aware of potential hazards to your hunting dog to help ensure a safe, enjoyable, and bountiful hunt.

Toxin alert: Hunting dogs encounter risks that backyard pets do not. Here are some toxins you should know about.

Cyanobacteria (blue-green algae): Each year, dogs in the US die after drinking water contaminated with blue-green algae. Toxic blue-green algae blooms typically occur during hot, dry weather, give the water a "pea soup" appearance, and may contain liver and/or neurotoxins. Cooler fall temperatures do not remove the potential for toxic blue-green algae blooms, as these can be present any time of the year, including cooler seasons. Signs of poisoning develop rapidly and can include vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, collapse, tremors, seizures, and difficulty breathing. Death from the neurotoxin can occur within minutes, while death from the liver toxin may take several days. Because treatment is often unsuccessful, prevention and immediate veterinary attention is key. Check for postings of blue-green algae and avoid letting your dog drink from or swim in scummy or foul-smelling water.

Lead Shot/Bullets: Aside from the trauma caused by gunshot wounds, the main concern with lead pellets and bullets is when accidental ingestion occurs. Signs of lead toxicity include behavior changes, vomiting, diarrhea, and neurologic problems such as incoordination, seizures, and blindness. Blood lead levels can be measured in cases of possible lead ingestion.

If your dog is shot, seek veterinary care immediately. Depending on the location, the bullet fragments or pellets may need to be removed, but in some situations, removal may not be needed as lead fragments embedded in muscle or under the skin rarely cause lead toxicity.

Clay Pigeons: Traditionally clay pigeons contained coal tar and heavy metals such as lead, zinc, copper, and nickel and could result in serious toxicity if ingested. Many modern clay pigeons are made of biodegradable materials that are often non-toxic, though gastrointestinal upset and possibly intestinal obstruction could still occur. If you have a "mouthy" hunting dog known to ingest toys or rocks, select non-toxic clay pigeons and prevent your dog from eating scattered pieces of clay pigeons.

Mushrooms: Hunting dogs exposed to the great outdoors are more likely to ingest a mushroom in the field than indoor dogs. While most mushrooms are not severely toxic, certain types can be very dangerous. One of the most dangerous is the plain looking Amanita phalloides or death cap mushroom (middle photo), which can be found throughout the United States. Because proper identification of mushrooms is extremely difficult and best done by experts, consider all ingestions of unidentified mushrooms as toxic until proven otherwise. Depending on the type of mushroom ingested, symptoms may include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, depression, tremors, and seizures, with ingestion potentially leading to liver and kidney damage.



Safety Tips

- ↪ As hunting dogs are more likely to run through barbed wire or lacerate themselves by running through dense brush, it can be helpful to have your dog wear a blaze orange chest protector vest. Not only does this protect vital organs from injury but also can help prevent your dog from accidentally getting shot.
- ↪ The excited hunting dog can take off after a scent, resulting in hours of searching for your companion. Make sure identification tags are well secured onto your dog's collar and your dog is microchipped to ensure a happy reunion.
- ↪ Active hunting dogs can sometimes develop "hunting dog hypoglycemia" or an acute drop in blood sugar followed by weakness, tremors, seizures, and collapse. Conditioning dogs before the season and making time for frequent water and snack breaks throughout the day is important as hunting dogs can use a tremendous amount of energy while working. There can be other causes of collapse in hunting dogs, so it is best to feed a snack and seek immediate veterinary care if any of these signs are noted.
- ↪ Heat stroke is always a big risk early in the hunting season – dogs are excited, may not be as well conditioned, and air temperatures and humidity tend to be higher, which can all increase the risk of overheating. If you notice your dog constantly panting, play it safe and give your dog a break to cool off and have some water. If your dog overheats, cool him or her down with a cool water bath, water hose, or wet towels and turn on a fan or vehicle air conditioning, if available. Stop cooling once your dog's temperature reaches 103.5 F.
- ↪ Hunting dogs are more susceptible to tick infestation when working outdoors. Use a veterinary prescribed flea and tick preventative to prevent transmission of infectious diseases like Lyme disease and Ehrlichia.
- ↪ Keep a canine first aid kit handy in case of emergency. Make sure to scope out the area where you are hunting and have the phone number for a local veterinarian, emergency veterinarian and Pet Poison Helpline programmed into your phone in the event of an emergency.

The best thing any hunter can do is to be educated about the common hazards or toxins, which predominantly affect hunting dogs. When in doubt or if you think your pet has been poisoned, please call your veterinarian or Pet Poison Helpline's 24-hour animal poison control center at **800-213-6680** immediately.

Pet Poison Helpline, an animal poison control center based out of Minneapolis, is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for pet owners and veterinary professionals that require assistance treating a potentially poisoned pet. The staff provides treatment advice for poisoning cases of all species, including dogs, cats, birds, small mammals, large animals and exotic species. As the most cost-effective option for animal poison control care, Pet Poison Helpline's per incident fee includes follow-up consultations for the duration of the treatment time. Pet Poison Helpline is available in North America by calling **800-213-6680**. Additional information can be found online at www.petpoisonhelpline.com.