

Keep your dogs away from mushrooms

By Sarah Sobanski

Apsley Veterinary Services is warning that all this rain has created the perfect conditions for mushroom growth ? that could mean bad news for your pet. The clinic announced it recently had a dog battling liver failure because it was poisoned after eating a mushroom.

I don't know about you, but my golden retriever once knocked over a glass dish full of brownies. When he couldn't get the brownies off the chunks of glass, he picked up a severed piece of dish ? bigger than his head ? with the brownies attached. Maybe he thought if he wished it hard enough, the glass would just taste like nuts in the chocolate ? which is also toxic for dogs.

I wandered home from a grocery run and found him looking up with me with a big, fat slice of broken dish and brownies in his mouth. He dropped it immediately, ?Uh oh, busted.? I don't have a large enough forehead to smack it this many times.

Luckily, Tan-Tan was fine, but, ? and as you may have guessed by his name ? being fine and being smart are two completely different things. That dog will eat anything. All dogs must have a contest where they compete to see who can eat the most ridiculous things. I've never had one of those picky-eater dogs. A cat, yes, but a dog? I dream about what that's like: no tipped over garbage cans, no missing shoes or underwear, no missing gerbil.

Thinking about my dog's unconventional diet however, I never thought what if he was outside and ate a toxic mushroom. Maybe I just assume animal instincts are smarter than that ? then again, butt sniffing.

The Apsley vet post linked to article **In Your Own Yard: Dogs and Poisonous Mushrooms** on preventivevet.com by Dr. Jason Nicholas, founder of the website and a former veterinarian. According to the article, its important to clear your yard of mushrooms during a wet spring or autumn ? prime growing conditions for the fungi.

?Depending on the type of mushroom, the quantity eaten, the time elapsed since eaten, and several other factors, the signs of toxicity will vary. But common signs might include any of the following: wobbling, loss of balance, or walking as if drunk, vomiting, salivating, yellowing of skin and ?whites of eyes,? sleep-like coma and seizures.

?If these, or other concerning signs are noted, or if you know your dog has eaten mushrooms, please contact your veterinarian, animal poison control, or your local Animal ER immediately. The liver is just too important an organ to lose. The sooner you bring your pup in, the sooner the decontamination and treatment processes can begin. Delaying results in more extensive organ damage, necessitating more advanced and expensive treatments.?

Ontario Poison Control ? similar to the article above which suggests property owners shouldn't take risks and remove all mushrooms from their yard ? states ?poisonous and non-poisonous mushrooms grow beside each other. Only a mushroom expert, called a mycologist, can tell the difference. It is dangerous to eat any mushroom that you have found outdoors. Eating even small parts of some mushrooms can cause sickness or death.?

Our area is dotted with mushroom experts and growers and eaters alike. If you've been eating the same picked mushrooms from your property for years like my family has, you're probably not going to go and destroy the entire crop because your pet may or may not decide to eat one this year. That said, it's important to check and be aware of what may or may not be harmful in your own backyard. What if the kids are over and find a new mushroom? What if they're curious enough to try it? Caution never hurt anyone.

As for me, I'll be making mushroom pesto tonight for dinner. Nothing like talking about poisonous mushrooms to work up a craving. Don't worry, I'll be getting them from a retailer. I'll make sure Tan-Tan makes healthier eating choices too.