

WORST-CASE SCENARIO.

HOW TO TREAT MISTLETOE POISONING

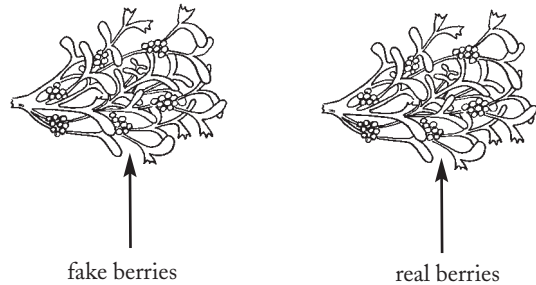
Discovery of partially chewed mistletoe, or the symptoms of mistletoe poisoning, calls for different responses for pets and humans.

1 Determine if real berries have been ingested.

Ingesting large numbers of real berries can cause a rapid increase in blood pressure that can lead to cardiac arrest. For this reason, many mistletoe distributors often replace the natural berries with plastic ones, which are light-colored and waxy looking. Check the mistletoe to see if the remaining berries are real; if they are, go to step 3.

2 Look for missing or chewed leaves.

Mistletoe leaves contain less of the toxins (tyramine and beta-phenethylamine) found in berries, but present another danger: Leaves have a protein toxin (phoratoxin) that causes severe gastrointestinal pain, cramping, and diarrhea. Unlike berries, leaves on packaged mistletoe are generally not plastic. The most common mistletoe leaves in the United States (*Phoradendron tomentosum*) are $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 inches long, smooth-edged, leathery, and green. These oblong leaves sprout in pairs from opposite sides of the stem. European mistletoe (*Viscum album*) has larger and thinner leaves that are less green.



Real mistletoe berries—which are poisonous—are sometimes darker and less waxy looking than plastic berries.

3 Watch for the symptoms of mistletoe poisoning.

Recognizing mistletoe poisoning is complicated because the poisons in the plant can cause opposite (yet all potentially lethal) symptoms: While berry toxins may elevate blood pressure, protein toxins in the leaves can lower blood pressure and heart rate. Look for severe intestinal distress in the form of vomiting, gagging, and diarrhea. Ingesting amounts under three berries or two leaves is unlikely to produce significant clinical effects in pets or humans and probably will not require treatment.

4 Call a veterinarian or poison control center.

Follow the specialist's instructions for dealing with poisoning.

IN PETS



Induce vomiting.

Vomiting should be induced unless two or more hours have passed since mistletoe ingestion.

- Use 1 teaspoon of syrup of ipecac per 10 pounds of animal.
- If ipecac is unavailable, induce vomiting with 3-percent hydrogen peroxide. Administer 1 to 3 teaspoons every 10 minutes a total of three times.
- If neither ipecac nor hydrogen peroxide is available, use $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 teaspoon of salt, placed directly on the back of the animal's tongue.



Coat the stomach.

If the pet ingested the mistletoe more than two hours ago, attempt to slow the plant's absorption by the body. Do not induce vomiting.

- Mix one tablet of activated charcoal per 2 teaspoons of water. Administer 1 teaspoon of the solution per 2 pounds of animal, followed by several cups of water. Do not use ipecac.
- After half an hour, administer 1 teaspoon of milk of magnesia per five pounds of animal. If unavailable, administer vegetable oil, egg whites, or milk to coat the gastrointestinal tract.



If the symptoms do not subside within four hours, take your pet to the veterinarian.

IN PEOPLE

1 Determine if the berries are real or not and ascertain what part of the plant has been consumed (see pages 73 and 74).

2 Call a poison control center immediately.
In the U.S., call 800-222-1222. Be prepared to tell the operator approximately how many leaves and (real) berries were ingested. The operator will instruct you on what to do. Do not administer pet rescue techniques to people.

Be Aware

- When administering help to your pet, be gentle—your pet is likely to be in distress. Be on guard for biting or wild behavior. Do not put your finger down your pet's throat to induce vomiting.
- When hanging mistletoe, consider placing it inside a piece of stocking (pantyhose) or a sealed sandwich bag to prevent any berries and leaves from falling to the floor, where they present a danger to pets and children.
- Poinsettias contain a latex sap that can irritate sensitive skin, and if ingested they may cause a burning sensation and intestinal disturbances, but they are not nearly as toxic as mistletoe.

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