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# ESSENTIAL OILS AND DOGS

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It seems that there is a new horror story every day on essential oils and pets lately. Our Dr Benson addressed the concerns with essential oils and cats in her blog: <https://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/blog/essential-oils-cats/> and now it is time to give our canine friends equal time.

The first thing that I will say about essential oils is that not understanding them or not being educated on

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with dogs. If you are going to use essential oils, you need to keep yourself, your family,



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in recent years due to the increase in pet owner's desire to treat more holistically or with natural remedies. In dogs, the most common essential oil toxicities that we see are to Melaleuca or Tea Tree Oil, Pennyroyal, Oil of Wintergreen, and Pine Oils. I want to break down each one of these potential toxins to give you a better understanding of where the danger exists with each of these oils.

Melaleuca oil, also known as tea tree oil, is our most common essential oil offender in toxicities to dog. Tea tree oil originates from the leaves of the Australian tea tree. These exposures often occur with application or administration of the concentrated tea tree-oil by well-meaning pet owners attempting to treat their pet for various skin conditions or external parasites such as fleas. It is equally absorbed with both dermal or oral

administration and both result in toxicity. These toxicities are not caused by the very low concentrations of tea tree oil in the various shampoos made for dogs. The concentrated products are the primary culprit. We can see signs of depression, ataxia (very uncoordinated gait), paralysis of the rear legs, vomiting, hypothermia (low body temperature), and dermal irritation. These exposures will require veterinary intervention. The signs can be present for up to 4 days with aggressive care and treatment.

Pennyroyal is an oil from *Mentha Pulegium*, more commonly known as European Pennyroyal or squaw mint. Pennyroyal has a long history in folk medicine with use as an insect repellent. It can be used by unsuspecting pet owners to treat flea infestations or to try to prevent flea infestations. Again, oral or dermal exposures can both result in toxicity. The short answer on the toxicity with pennyroyal is that it causes hepatic necrosis or liver failure. We can see the dog become sick after exposure with vomiting, diarrhea, both of which can be bloody, lethargy and death due to hepatic necrosis. Again, aggressive veterinary care is needed to try to support the liver and prevent liver failure. Pennyroyal is a known toxin to dogs and all forms of it should be avoided in dogs.

Our third essential oil of concern is Oil of Wintergreen. It is derived from the *Gaultheria Procumbens* or the Eastern Teaberry. Long story short, Oil of Wintergreen contains methyl salicylates, more commonly known as aspirin. It is many times used topically as a pain reliever for muscle aches and pains but may also be used in holiday candies with bakers having a bottle of concentrated product. Dogs can show signs of aspirin toxicity and we can see signs of vomiting due to severe gastrointestinal upset and ulcers, along with potential renal and liver failure. Aggressive veterinary care is needed for gastrointestinal protection and renal and hepatic support.

On to Pine Oils. Pine oils are derived from *Pinus sylvestris* or the Scots Pine located in Europe. In fact, it is the national tree of Scotland. Pine oils are used as a natural disinfectant, deodorizer, household cleaning products and massage oils. The touted benefits of pine oil include increasing circulation, aids in decreasing swelling, tenderness and pain in sore joints and muscles along with antibacterial properties. What we can see in dogs with dermal or oral exposure can be dermal or gastrointestinal irritation, vomiting that may be bloody, drooling, weakness, ataxia, along with affects to the central nervous system, and potential renal and liver affects. Again, aggressive care is needed to limit or decrease the exposure and prevent worsening clinical signs.

Another element of concern with essential oils is with the risk of aspiration and aspiration pneumonia. Because of the viscosity of oils, we get concerned with the dog getting the oil in their lungs not only when ingesting it, but because of the irritation that it can cause to the gastrointestinal tract, we can see the oil be aspirated when it is vomited back up. For this reason, we do not recommend induction of emesis with oil products and immediate veterinary care is needed with most of these exposures.

Prevention is the best medicine in limiting essential oil toxicities in dogs. Many of the exposures that we deal with are from well-meaning pet owners that have used an essential oil without knowing the consequences or risks involved with these types of volatile oils. I would recommend discussing any use of essential oils with your veterinarian prior to use. If they do not have experience with essential oils, they will likely know someone in the veterinary profession that they can refer you to get the information that you need for safe use of essential oils.

If you have an exposure to an essential oil product in your pet, please do not hesitate to contact us for information. We are here 24/7 to assist you and your pet!



Medical Assistance:

1 (855) 764-7661

Non-medical Assistance:

[info@petpoisonhelpline.com](mailto:info@petpoisonhelpline.com)

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