



Cane Toads: A Serious Threat to Pets in Palm Beach County

Protect Your Pets from This Dangerous Invasive Species

Many Florida residents are unaware that a common-looking toad found in our neighborhoods can be deadly to dogs and other pets. Recently, a local family experienced this tragedy firsthand when their dog encountered a cane toad and did not survive.

Cane toads (also known as Bufo toads, giant toads, or marine toads) are an invasive species found throughout South Florida. They secrete a powerful toxin from glands behind their eyes. A curious dog only has to lick, mouth, or bite a cane toad to receive a potentially fatal dose

How to Identify a Cane Toad

Adult cane toads are typically:

- Large—often 4 to 9 inches long
- Brown, tan, gray-brown, or reddish-brown
- Covered with warty skin
- Equipped with large triangular poison glands behind the eyes that angle down toward the shoulders
- Missing the prominent ridges or crests found on many native Florida toads

A good rule of thumb: **If you see a toad larger than about 4 inches in South Florida, it is likely a cane toad.**

Why Are They Dangerous?

Cane toads produce a milky toxin called bufotoxin. When a dog bites or mouths the toad, the toxin is rapidly absorbed through the gums and mouth tissues. The poison affects the nervous system and heart and can cause death if treatment is delayed. ([Tequesta](#))

Signs of Cane Toad Poisoning

Symptoms usually appear within minutes and may include:

- Excessive drooling or foaming at the mouth
- Bright red gums
- Pawing at the mouth
- Head shaking
- Vomiting
- Disorientation or loss of coordination
- Tremors or seizures
- Difficulty breathing
- Collapse

What To Do Immediately

If you suspect your pet has had contact with a cane toad:

1. Flush the Mouth Immediately

Use a gentle stream of water to rinse the pet's mouth for 10–15 minutes.

Important:

- Direct water from the side of the mouth toward the front.
- Keep the pet's head pointed downward so water and toxins flow out rather than being swallowed.
- If possible, wipe the gums and tongue with a wet cloth while rinsing.

2. Seek Emergency Veterinary Care Immediately

Do not wait to see if symptoms improve. Even if your pet appears normal after rinsing, veterinary evaluation is strongly recommended. Time is critical. If the encounter happened during your vet's normal business hours, call them while taking your pet to their clinic. If it occurs afterhours or on the weekend, the closest 24 hours emergency vet clinic is:

VCA Palm Beach Veterinary Specialists

3884 Forest Hill Blvd, West Palm Beach, FL 33406

(561) 434-5700

How to Reduce Cane Toads Around Your Home

Cane toads are most active:

- At dusk and night
- After rainfall
- Around standing water
- Near pet food and water bowls

To make your yard less attractive to cane toads:

- Bring pet food and water bowls indoors at night.
- Eliminate standing water where possible.
- Keep grass trimmed short.
- Remove debris, wood piles, and dense ground cover.
- Supervise pets outdoors after dark.
- Use a flashlight when letting dogs out at night.

These simple steps can significantly reduce the likelihood of an encounter. ([Florida Trend](#))

A Final Reminder

Most dogs survive cane toad encounters when owners recognize the danger and act immediately. Knowing how to identify a cane toad, recognizing the symptoms of poisoning, and flushing the mouth without delay can make the difference between life and death.

Please share this information with neighbors, friends, pet sitters, and anyone who walks dogs in our community.

The loss of a beloved pet can happen in just a few minutes after contact with a cane toad. By learning to recognize these invasive toads and knowing how to respond, we can help keep our pets and our neighbors' pets safe.
