Safety Tips for Hunting Dogs

Hunting Season is fast approaching - Tips from Pet Poison Helpline to Help Keep Your Dog Safe!

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As you and your Labrador retriever, GSP, or GWP 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, hunting dogs in the US die as a result of drinking from water contaminated with blue-green algae. Toxic blue-green algae contain liver and/or neurotoxins and often occur during hot, dry weather and give the water a "pea soup" appearance. Signs of poisoning show up immediately, and include vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, collapse, tremors, seizures, and jaundice (yellow skin and gums). 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. Providing fresh water for your dog is imperative.

Lead Shot/Bullets: Aside from the trauma caused by gunshot wounds, the lead found in pellets and bullets may lead to lead poisoning if left in the body. If your dog is shot, seek veterinary care immediately. If the bullet fragments or pellets cannot be removed, check blood lead levels to ensure that chronic lead poisoning does not occur. Signs of lead toxicity include behavioral changes, gastrointestinal signs (i.e., vomiting, diarrhea), and neurologic problems (including walking drunk, seizuring, and blindness.)

Clay Pigeons: These contain coal tar and heavy metals such as lead, zinc, copper, and nickel, and can result in toxicity if ingested. If you have a "mouthy" hunting dog known to ingest toys or rocks, beware. Make sure they are not eating scattered pieces of clay pigeons, as poisoning can result in liver, brain and kidney damage.

Mushrooms: Being that hunting dogs are exposed to the great outdoors, they're more likely to ingest a mushroom in the field than a couch potato dog. While most mushrooms are generally non-toxic, certain types can be very dangerous. One of the most dangerous is the plain looking *Amanita phalloides* or death cap mushroom, found throughout the United States. Because proper identification of mushrooms is extremely difficult and often only done by experts, consider all ingestions of unidentified mushrooms as toxic until proven otherwise. Depending on the type of mushroom ingested, symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, depression, tremors, and seizures, with ingestion usually 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 is important to keep your dog in a blaze orange chest protector vest. Not only does this protect vital organs from injury, but also it saves on expensive vet bills.

- For dogs that do not have an electronic shock collar on, 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 to ensure a happy reunion.

- Rarely, a genetic abnormality in Labrador retrievers called "hunting dog hypoglycemia" can result in an acute drop in blood sugar, resulting in the collapse of a normally active dog. Making time for frequent water and snack breaks throughout the day is important. Dogs exhibiting hunting dog hypoglycemia should not be bred, so the trait is not passed on genetically to their offspring.

- Heat stroke is always a big risk early in the hunting season – dogs are excited and combined with the higher air temperatures, this can increase chances of heat exhaustion. Keeping a canine first aid kit handy, along with a thermometer, is important in case of emergency. If you notice your dog constantly panting, make sure to take frequent water breaks and water dips (in ponds without blue-green algae!) When in doubt, always play it safe and give your dog a break to cool off.

- Hunting dogs are more predisposed to tick infestation when out hunting – using a veterinary prescribed flea and tick preventative is key to prevent transmission of infectious diseases like Lyme disease and Ehrlichia.

- 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.

About Pet Poison Helpline: Pet Poison Helpline is a service available 24 hours, seven days a week for pet owners, veterinarians and veterinary technicians that require assistance treating a potentially poisoned pet. Staff can provide treatment advice for poisoning cases of all species, including dogs, cats, birds, small mammals, large animals and exotic species. As animal poison controls do not receive any state or federal funding the way human poison controls do, there is a small per incident fee of **$39.00** per case, but this includes free follow-up with both you and the veterinarian treating your dog during the duration of the poison case. Pet Poison Helpline is the most cost-effective option for animal poison control care in North America. Pet Poison Helpline is available in North America by calling **800-213-6680**. Additional information can be found online at www.petpoisonhelpline.com.