

Mercer MRC

A Newsletter for and about our volunteers



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This month we have several health observances to note, including National Handwashing Awareness Week, National Influenza Vaccination Week, and Safe Toys and Celebrations Month. The holiday season is a joyous time for many people, and these observances highlight the importance of this being a safe season for people and their pets as well.

In addition to the onset of influenza season and the potential for foodborne illnesses associated with holiday celebrations, colder temperatures present a challenge to staying safe and well, whether it be due to winter weather issues (shoveling snow, traveling in a snow storm, etc.) or protecting your outdoor pets from the cold.



We hope the tips we have provided in this issue help ensure a safe and healthy holiday season for you and your family and friends, and last, but not least, your furry friends.

*Happy Holidays from the Mercer County
Division of Public Health!*

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Holiday safety and wellness tips

For you and your family...

1. Prevent foodborne illness: According to the CDC, Each year, 1 in 6 people get sick from eating contaminated food. Don't be a foodborne illness statistic! When preparing food, remember these simple tips: Wash hands and surfaces often; separate raw meat from ready-to-eat foods such as salad; cook meat thoroughly; and refrigerate promptly.



Although it is sometimes tempting to do so, eating or tasting unbaked products that are intended to be cooked, such as cookie dough or batter, can make you sick. Children can also get sick from handling or eating raw dough used for crafts. Flour isn't treated to kill bacteria such as *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*). So germs can contaminate grain while it's still in the field or during production. The bacteria are killed when food made with flour is cooked. Also, raw eggs that are used to make dough or batter can contain Salmonella bacteria that can make you sick.



2. Wash your hands frequently:

Proper handwashing can not only protect you from foodborne illness, but also from influenza and many other diseases. Follow these easy handwashing steps to stay safe:

- **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- **Scrub** your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
- Dry your hands thoroughly.

3. Stay active, eat healthy, and plan activities that don't center around food: After a large holiday meal, it is tempting to take a nap. Try taking a walk instead! Eat unhealthy foods in small portions, and balance out meals with healthy, lower calorie, higher fiber foods.

For your pets...

Keep people food away from pets. The following foods are especially dangerous for pets:

- **Chocolate** is toxic to dogs and cats. Consider all chocolate off limits for pets.
- **Other sweets and baked goods** also should be kept out of reach. Not only are they often too rich for pets; an artificial sweetener often found in baked goods, candy and chewing gum, xylitol, has been linked to liver failure and death in dogs.
- **Turkey and turkey skin** – sometimes even in small amounts – can cause pancreatitis in pets.



- **Table scraps** – including gravy and meat fat –also should be kept away from pets. Table scraps can be especially fattening and hard for animals to digest and can cause pancreatitis. Onions, raisins and grapes are poisonous to pets. Yeast dough can cause problems for pets, including painful gas and potentially dangerous bloating.

Clear the food from your table, counters and serving areas when you are done using them – and make sure the trash gets put where your pet can't reach it. A turkey or chicken carcass or other large quantities of meat sitting out on the carving table, or left in a trash container that is easily opened, could be deadly to your family pet. Dispose of carcasses and bones – and anything used to wrap or tie the meat, such as strings, bags and packaging – in a covered, tightly secured trash bag placed in a closed trash container outdoors (or behind a closed, locked door).

If you believe your pet has been poisoned or eaten something it shouldn't have, call your veterinarian or local veterinary emergency clinic immediately. You may also call the New Jersey Poison Center at: **800-222-1222** or the ASPCA Poison Control Hotline: 1-888-426-4435. Signs of pet distress include: sudden changes in behavior, depression, pain, vomiting, or diarrhea.

Decorating

- **Christmas trees** can tip over if pets climb on them or try to play with the lights and ornaments. Consider tying your tree to the ceiling or a doorframe using fishing line to secure it.
- **Water additives for Christmas trees** can be hazardous to your pets. Do not add aspirin, sugar, or anything to the water for your tree if you have pets in the house.
- **Ornaments** can cause hazards for pets. Broken ornaments can cause injuries, and ingested ornaments can cause intestinal blockage or even toxicity. Keep any homemade ornaments, particularly those made from salt-dough or other food-based materials, out of reach of pets.
- **Tinsel and other holiday decorations** also can be tempting for pets to eat. Consuming them can cause intestinal blockages, sometimes requiring surgery. Breakable ornaments or decorations can cause injuries.



- **Electric lights** can cause burns when a curious pet chews the cords.
- **Flowers and festive plants** can result in an emergency veterinary visit if your pet gets hold of them. Amaryllis, mistletoe, balsam, pine, cedar, and holly are among the common holiday plants that can be dangerous and even poisonous to pets who decide to eat them. Poinsettias can be troublesome as well.
- **Candles** are attractive to pets as well as people. Never leave a pet alone in an area with a lit candle; it could result in a fire.
- **Potpourris** should be kept out of reach of inquisitive pets. Liquid potpourris pose risks because they contain essential oils and cationic detergents that can severely damage your pet's mouth, eyes and skin. Solid potpourris could cause problems if eaten.

Preparing your pets for winter weather

Just like people, pets need protection from winter weather. If an animal's coat gets wet, the fur loses much of its insulating ability. Your pet's toes, nose, and ears are even more vulnerable to cold temperatures. Whenever the temperature drops below freezing, protect your pets by providing:

- warm, dry, draft-free shelter
- plenty of food
- lots of water

Puppies and kittens as well as older dogs and cats should be kept inside, due to the lack of fat, metabolism, and the full fur coat needed to stay warm when temperatures fall. When it's cold or wet out, it's vital to keep younger, older, and sick pets indoors.

Monitor your pet closely when they are outside during winter weather conditions. Snow can freeze quickly on paws and cause problems. Salt spread on sidewalks can burn your pet's paws. Protective booties for dogs should fit snugly, but not too tight to avoid cutting off your dog's circulation. Cats and dogs are susceptible to frostbite and hypothermia just like people.

Know the symptoms of Hypothermia in dogs and cats:

- violent shivering, followed by listlessness
- weak pulse
- lethargy
- muscle stiffness
- problems breathing
- lack of appetite
- rectal temperature below 98°F
- coma
- cardiac arrest



Hypothermia Treatment:

Wrap your pet in a warm blanket or coat (you can warm blankets and coats in the dryer for a few minutes).

- Bring your pet into a warm room.
- Give your pet a solution of four teaspoons honey or sugar dissolved in warm water to drink. You can also put 1-2 teaspoons of corn syrup on the gums if your pet is too weak to drink. This provides an immediate energy boost.
- Place warm, towel-wrapped water bottles against your pet's abdomen or at her armpits and chest, then wrap her in a blanket. Do not use hair dryers, heating pads, or electric blankets to warm up a hypothermic pet as this may result in burns or cause surface blood vessels to dilate, which compromises circulation to vital organs.
- Call your veterinarian immediately.

Cold temperatures, snow, and ice can discourage both people and their pets from wanting to leave their cosy surroundings to go outside. The following are some tips to help get your dog outside to go potty in the winter:

—Keep a small area in the yard shoveled clear of snow. Then encourage your pet to use this spot. It helps if you shovel a path to this snow-free area.

4 Buy booties. If your dog is bothered by the snow or ice touching its feet, put snow booties on

—Buy booties. If your dog is bothered by the snow or ice touching its feet, put snow booties on your dog just before taking it outside.

- Stay close. Wait by the door while your dog goes potty, then let him back in as soon as he's done.
- Make an indoor potty. Use pet pee pads or indoor pee patches. Pee pads are an especially effective option for small, older, or sick dogs. Indoor pee patches consist of small swathes of fake grass on top of a broad, hollow tray into which urine collects each time a dog goes potty.
- Some smaller dogs can also be litter box-trained; even mature dogs can be taught to use a box inside. This option requires patience as training your dog to use a litter box doesn't happen overnight.



Other safety considerations:

1: Be aware that cats sometimes shelter under cars, or in the engine compartment of cars. Check underneath your car, bang on the hood, and honk the horn before starting the engine. Banging on the hood of the car if it is parked outside or even in a garage if your cat has access to it can prevent injury or death.

2: Antifreeze can kill your pets. Cats in particular can die from ingesting very small amounts of antifreeze, such as from walking through a leak and then licking their paws. Make sure your car is not leaking antifreeze, and make sure all antifreeze containers are tightly closed and put away on a high shelf.

To keep your pets safe during the holidays, here are some tips from the American Veterinary Medical Foundation (AVMA):

1. Keep these numbers posted in an easy-to-find location in case of emergencies:

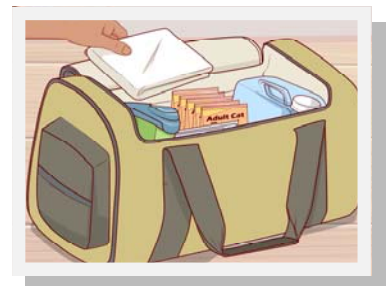
- Your veterinarian's phone number
- 24/7 emergency veterinary clinic
- New Jersey Poison Center: 800-222-1222

ASPCA Poison Control Hotline: 1-888-426-4435 (A fee may apply.)



2. Prepare a pet evacuation kit if you need to evacuate your home. Include in the kit the following:

- Food and medicine
- First aid kit
- Sanitation supplies
- Important documents
- Travel Supplies
- Comfort items



Recent Trainings & Exercises

This year Mercer MRC Coordinator Stephanie Mendelsohn implemented the MRC volunteer core curriculum training on the College of New Jersey (TCNJ) campus for the third consecutive year. Twenty-seven public health and nursing major TCNJ students completed the curriculum during the fall semester to become Mercer County MRC volunteers. The training culminated in an Open POD exercise with Hamilton Township Health Department on November 30.

Mercer County Community College (MCCC) students also completed the MRC curriculum training this year for the first time. Seventeen MCCC students became MRC volunteers, with five students also participating in the Hamilton POD exercise. Additional colleges in Mercer County have expressed interest in collaborating with Mercer County to have the program implemented on their campus, possibly beginning as soon as the spring semester.



“Residents” waiting in line to receive medication during the Hamilton POD exercise at the Colonial Volunteer Firehouse.



Mercer County Community College MRC volunteer Nathalie Torres (green vest) triages “residents” arriving at the Hamilton POD.



Carrying out Incident Command roles at the Mercer County Community College ICS 100 MRC course.

If you know someone who may be interested in joining the MRC, or you are currently not a member and are interested in joining, please contact Stephanie Mendelsohn, MRC Coordinator at: smendelsohn@mercercounty.org or call 609-989-6898.