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## **MARIJUANA TOXICITY**

### ***What is marijuana?***

Marijuana is a popular recreational drug smoked by millions of people worldwide. The active ingredient is THC or tetrahydrocannabinol. THC can be used in people for nausea control and appetite stimulation in patients undergoing chemotherapy, glaucoma treatment, and pain relief.

### ***Who is the typical victim?***

Pets usually gain exposure through ingestion of leftover baked goods containing marijuana, ingesting the butts of marijuana cigarettes, or ingesting the dried leaves and flowers. In dogs, clinical signs typically begin within an hour of ingestion. Because THC is stored in the body's fat deposits, the effects of marijuana ingestion can last for days.



### ***What are the symptoms of marijuana toxicity?***

Signs include: incoordination and listlessness along with dilated pupils, slow heart rate, low body temperature, aggression, excessive salivation, tremoring and often urinary incontinence. Marijuana toxicity can look similar to intoxication with numerous other sedatives. It is very important for all the relevant information to be presented to the veterinarian if the pet is to be helped.

Veterinarians are not obligated to report to local police. If you know marijuana was involved in an intoxication it is important to make this information known. Obviously this goes for other recreational drugs as well.

### ***How is marijuana toxicity diagnosed?***

Urine testing similar to that done with humans can be done in dogs to make the diagnosis of marijuana intoxication. However, these human urine tests are not as sensitive for dogs – this means that even though a human urine marijuana test may come back negative the dog still could have ingested marijuana. Many times, a diagnosis of marijuana toxicity is made based on the owner's history and appropriate symptoms.

### ***How is marijuana toxicity treated?***

If less than an hour has passed since the marijuana has been eaten it may be possible to induce vomiting. However, after symptoms have started, the nausea control properties of THC make it very difficult to induce vomiting. Further, if the patient is

extremely sedated, vomiting can be dangerous as vomit can be inhaled and cause serious and deadly aspiration pneumonia.

Activated charcoal is a liquid material used in the treatment of poisoning. Activated charcoal is given orally and as it passes from one end to the other, toxins are trapped in the charcoal so that when the charcoal passes from the patient, the toxins pass, too. This technique of detoxification may be used in the treatment of marijuana toxicity.

Fluid support and keeping the patient warm may also be needed in treatment. If the patient has lost consciousness, the more intense observation and support is needed.

The chance of fatality is statistically small but possible.