

Lead Poisoning In Cats, Dogs and Birds

So what does a lead poisoned pet mean for you and your family?

Lead poisoning is a common source of accidental poisoning in pets, mainly puppies. Many animals are lead poisoned every week! If you have a pet that is diagnosed with lead poisoning - chances are that you may have been exposed as well.

This is of particular concern if there are children or pregnant women in the household

- Who is most at risk from lead
- Pregnant women and their unborn babies
- People who live in (especially children) and/or renovate pre 1970 houses
- Workers in lead jobs or those with lead hobbies and their families

Cats and Dogs

Unlike the dramatic onset of clinical signs seen with most small animal poisonings, lead poisoning often has an insidious onset. The potential sources of lead for domestic animals are numerous and widespread. Ingestion of lead-based paints is the most commonly identified source of lead in poisoned cats and dogs. Renovations of older houses involving sanding or scraping lead based paint is believed to be the major origin of the lead based paint in these instances. Other lead sources include lead acid batteries (e.g. car batteries), roofing materials, plumbing supplies, bullets, solder, pewter, linoleum, grease, putty, lead foil, toys, improperly glazed ceramic water or food bowls and fishing sinkers.

Cats only rarely chew or ingest non-food items, thus eliminating many of the common sources of lead that poison dogs. However, because of their grooming habits, cats are more a risk of accidental ingestion of lead particles that contaminate their fur and paws.

The clinical signs of lead toxicity in dogs include convulsions or fits, vomiting and diarrhea, abdominal pain and bizarre behavior such as hysteria. Lead poisoning is more commonly diagnosed in younger dogs because they are more likely to chew on objects. However, adult dogs may also be affected. In contrast, lead poisoning in cats often only causes loss of appetite and signs such as fits are uncommon. Vomiting and diarrhea occur occasionally. Cats with lead toxicity are usually adult although occasionally kittens may be affected.

Prior to the introduction of oral fluid testing, diagnosis of lead toxicity involves either a urine or a blood test. The diagnosis is sometimes difficult and two different tests may be required to confirm that lead poisoning is present, particularly in cats.



[Click here to order a Pet Lead Test Kit](#)

Lead Toxicity in Birds

Lead poisoning of birds is common and it is often fatal. Lead poisoning is often linked with other heavy metal poisonings, especially zinc poisoning (from galvanized metal), and occasionally copper, chromium and mercury poisonings. The signs or "symptoms" affected birds show are often and easily attributed mistakenly to other causes and disease processes. Lead poisoning can cause sudden death, or it can cause a slow debilitating death over months or years.

Lead poisoning can be linked to many different signs of illness, most of which can also be the result of other illnesses. Such signs can include reduced appetite, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, passing too much urine (sometimes blood tinged), drinking too much, being weak, uncoordinated and sometimes partly paralyzed, especially in the feet. Some birds have intermittent convulsions and fits.

Lead and other heavy metal poisonings cause damage to various organs and also interfere with the immune system such that many birds with sub-acute and chronic poisoning develop infections that contribute to the birds' suffering and deaths.

There are many sources of lead and other heavy metals that poison birds. Water birds such as ducks have been the targets of shooters for many years and swamps, marshlands and lakes where they have congregated are often heavily contaminated with lead shot. Whether or not the birds are actually shot or "just swallow" some, they still end up dying from the lead, unless treated. Old paint, some old varnishes, and paint scrapings remain poisonous for years. Lead and lead oxides are also found in lead flashing (used on roofs, around chimneys, and to stop "rising damp" in older buildings. Solder, curtain weights, fishing sinkers, car wheel rim weights, lead lined windows and lamp shades, costume jewelry, metal buttons and buckles, and a great variety of galvanized metal objects have all been sources of lead poisoning.

Most birdcages are galvanized and potentially deadly despite assurances that this is not so from some salespeople. Similarly many water containers for cockatoos are galvanized and sealed with solder. Some seed bells are hung on galvanized wire. Many shiny bells and cage ornaments corrode and flake after a few years and can poison and sometimes kill the birds for whom they were provided. Some brass, bronze and pewter containers can also be a source of poisoning. Lead can also accumulate in birds from exposure to lots of petrol fumes over time. At the turn of the 19th century there were many small tin making factories and smelters in some inner city (Sydney) areas and the soil of gardens built on such sites is often still heavily contaminated with lead.

The diagnosis and treatment of lead poisoning are both "tricky" in birds. My advice is that if you suspect you have a bird that might be poisoned, consult a veterinary surgeon with an expressed interest in bird medicine and health, or perform an oral fluid test. Such vets are likely to have either FACSc (Avian Health) or MACVSc (Avian Health) qualifications or at least be member of the Association of Avian Veterinarians. Ask for a referral if help is not forthcoming.

For further information, please contact [Patriot Drug and DNA Testing, Inc.](http://www.patriotdna.com/) (<http://www.patriotdna.com/>) or visit [American Medical Saliva Testing, Inc.](http://www.americanmedicalsaliva.com/)