

Keep pets safe from dangerous mushrooms

By Julia Lamont

After months of parched, brown hillsides and drought-battered landscapes, the recent rains have brought a refreshing hit of green to Marin. But along with that intoxicating verdancy, luring us out into our yards and onto area trails, comes a potentially toxic threat: mushrooms.

Mushrooms sprout up quickly during the rainy season and while most are harmless, some are dangerous and even deadly. If your dog is spending time outdoors, even on leash, it's important to familiarize yourself with which fungi pose a threat. It only takes a moment for a curious pup to take an errant chomp.

Deadly mushrooms in Marin

The most dangerous varieties found in Marin are the death cap (*Amanita phalloides*) and destroying angel (*Amanita ocreata*). Both mushrooms are innocuous-looking and can spring up quickly during wet weather. They're found under or near trees, almost always oak. While they can be easily identified by an experienced mycologist, the untrained eye can often confuse them with similar-looking, edible mushrooms, especially when they first sprout.

The death cap can vary greatly in size and color, reaching anywhere from a mere inch to 8 inches across, and come in a range of shades of white, green, yellow, and brown. As their name implies, these deadly fungi are incredibly toxic. Eating even a small amount — as little as half a mushroom — can cause liver or kidney failure in humans, and a mere bite can prove fatal for dogs. In this case, an ounce of prevention is worth far more than a pound of cure.

Protect your pets

Keep a close eye on curious dogs when out for walks and hikes, especially if your pup is an avid sniffer or likes to dig. Death caps in particular emit a pungent smell when they decompose that might appeal to your dog. While keeping your dog on leash will always be safest, if you do allow your dog off-leash time, make sure they have a solid recall and respond promptly to a "leave it" command.

At home, check your yard and other areas around your home, especially if your pets will have unsupervised access at any time. Your safest bet is clearing away any and all

mushrooms, regardless of what kind they are, to ensure no harmful ones are left behind.

If your dog comes in contact with a toxic mushroom, or a mushroom that you can't identify, get them to a veterinarian as soon as possible. If possible, carefully collect and bring a sample of the mushroom. You can also contact the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at 888-426-4435, open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year (a \$65 consultation fee may be applied to your credit card).

Symptoms may not appear for some time after consumption, but keep an eye open for the following signs of mushroom poisoning:

- Excessive salivating
- Signs of gastrointestinal upset like vomiting and diarrhea
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes)
- Lethargy
- A wobbly gait or loss of balance
- Seizures

Luckily, most mushrooms you'll encounter in Marin County are going to be perfectly harmless. But being prepared with a little knowledge before you head outdoors to enjoy the sunshine with your pets can be the difference between disaster and a day of fun.

Julia Lamont is the social media and marketing specialist for Marin Humane, which contributes Tails of Marin articles and welcomes animal-related questions and stories about the people and animals in our community. Go to marinhumane.org, find us on social media @marinhumane, or email lbloch@marinhumane.org.