

Showing Cats Love on Valentine's Day

February events highlight safe, loving homes for cats and dogs.

Posted: Feb. 13, 2009, 3 a.m. EST

Animal-welfare groups have adoption drives and reminders about household hazards planned for Valentine's Day. This Valentine's Day, animal welfare organizations across the country have made special plans to focus on making cats and dogs feel loved, from adoption specials during the month of February to offering tips to pet owners on protecting their animals from hazardous treats.

In New York, for example, the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals designated February as I Love NYC Pets month, a citywide pet adoption and spaying and neutering event. The nonprofit alliance, a public-private partnership of more than 140 rescue groups and shelters, celebrates its third annual Valentine's Day drive this year, featuring more than 50 adoption events and extended adoption hours at animal shelters.

Petsmart Charities plans to host a Valentine's weekend adoption drive to give thousands of pets a "Second Chance for Love." The goal of the three-day event, set for Feb. 13-15 in more than 1,051 adoption centers in U.S. Petsmart stores, is to find loving homes for 13,500 cats and dogs.

For those who already share a home with a pet, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals offers Valentine's Day safety tips. The ASPCA's poison-control experts said the two most common holiday hazards to watch for are chocolate and lilies.

The organization provides the following Feb. 14 guidelines: **Chocolate Overload.** All varieties of chocolate can be potentially poisonous to animals, said Dr. Steven Hansen, veterinary toxicologist and senior vice president of the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center in Urbana, Ill. He advises pet owners to watch for symptoms of excessive ingestion of chocolate, including vomiting, diarrhea, increased urination and thirst, abnormal heart rate and rhythm as well as hyperactivity and seizures.

Chew on This. Gum and candy often contain large amounts of the sweetener xylitol, which can be toxic to pets, especially dogs. Ingestion can produce a fairly sudden drop in blood sugar, and results in depression, loss of coordination, seizures and even liver failure.

Toxic Flowers. Pets may be interested in taste-testing the flowers on your coffee table. Hansen said pet owners might notice symptoms of stomach upset, such as vomiting or diarrhea, if their pet has ingested a particularly offensive plant or flower. Most notably, cat owners should be careful if they have lilies in the house, as these flowers can be deadly.

Gift a Pet, Don't Give One. Adoption center professional Gail Buchwald suggests presenting a loved one with a gift certificate to adopt from the ASPCA — if you are in the Manhattan area — or a local shelter.