

Psychiatric Medications Pose Increased Risk for Unwary Pets

ASPCA warns that increased use of antidepressants is leading to more accidents.

As Americans use antidepressant medications more often, the number of pets accidentally poisoned when they find and eat these pills is increasing, says the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

In 2005, the ASPCA Poison Control Center handled nearly 400 cases of pets that had eaten antidepressant drugs, according to statistics released this month. That is about 100 more cases than the previous year, and there were around 200 calls related to antidepressants in 2003.

Veterinarians with the center believe that the gradual increase is likely due to more people using the medications, although the centers growing popularity could have an affect on the statistics.

Certainly there could be a lot of factors, said ASPCA spokeswoman Dana Farbman, a veterinary technician. Our [overall] call volume goes up every year.

Farbman said that the most common types of pet poisonings handled at the center are related to human medications, with more than 38,000 cases in 2004. The most prevalent problem is with painkillers such as acetaminophen. Just one tablet could kill an average cat.

For antidepressants, dosage is a key issue, since the amount of medication that is helpful and the amount that is harmful can be very narrow.

To avoid accidental poisonings, the ASPCA recommends that pet owners keep all their medications in a secure cabinet away from pets reach.

Child-proof does not mean pet-proof, Farbman says, noting that dogs can easily chew through difficult-to-open caps.

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