

Snail Bait / Rodenticide Toxicity

During spring when the weather is warming up we see a lot of dogs that have eaten rat or snail bait. Both these products usually contain a "bittering" agent which is designed to deter children and dogs from eating the bait, but unfortunately this does not always work. Labradors in particular have a tendency to eat the bait so quickly they don't realise its tastes bitter until it is gone!

If you see your dog eat either of these poisons it is best to come to the clinic immediately so that we can induce your dog to vomit. Removing the toxin from the stomach before it is absorbed is the best treatment. If it is not possible to get to the clinic or it is going to be more than 30 minutes you can try to get your dog to vomit at home by forcing it to drink some salt water or ingest some salt granules. Make sure there is plenty of water available. Usually animals will still need further treatment after the toxin has been removed from the stomach. It is helpful to bring the packaging from the poison if possible, so we can identify exactly which type of toxin it contains.

These toxins work in very different ways and cause different types of poisoning. Rodenticides (eg Rat Sak) work by inhibiting the animals clotting system. This means that they can bleed or haemorrhage spontaneously which can be fatal. You may notice bleeding from the gums after eating or blood in the urine or faeces, but often the bleeding occurs in the lungs or abdomen, so it is not obvious. It can take up to 3 weeks from eating the poison for this to occur. If you suspect your dog may have eaten rat poison, even if it seems fine, it is best to come to the clinic and see one of our vets, as an antidote in the form of a syrup or tablet can be prescribed, which will easily prevent a fatal outcome.

Snail and slug pellets cause a more immediate toxicity. Dogs become wobbly on their feet, twitch or tremor, pant and salivate and they can have vomiting and diarrhoea. This can then progress to seizures. This poisoning can be fatal or cause irreversible damage very quickly, so immediate treatment is necessary. There is no specific antidote to this toxin, so dogs usually need to be hospitalised for some time on IV fluids and medications to stop the seizures.

Cats generally do not eat rat or snail baits as they are very fussy eaters. However, they can still be poisoned by rodenticides if they consume a mouse or rat that has been poisoned (dogs can also be poisoned in this way). So if this is suspected, or you notice any bleeding, it is always best to consult our vets as soon as possible.

If you do use these products at home make sure they are stored in a place in the shed where it is absolutely impossible for your dog to get to them, even if it got into the shed. Never use snail bait in a garden your dog has access to. Using rat bait is very risky if you own a pet, as rodents can carry the bait to a place where your dog can get to it, or they may consume poisoned rodents.