

FACTSHEET

Permethrin poisoning

Permethrin poisoning is one of the most common causes of poisoning of cats worldwide and it can be life threatening in many cases.

What is permethrin?

Permethrin is a synthetic insecticide known as a pyrethroid. It is not the naturally occurring pyrethrin insecticide found in Chrysanthemum plants. It's important to know the difference because permethrin (a pyrethroid) is highly toxic to cats and is found in many insecticide and pest control products (e.g. fly spray, garden insect sprays, cockroach spray, ant powder, mosquito coils) and many flea and tick spot-on products for dogs. The natural occurring pyrethrin from the Chrysanthemum plant is also toxic to cats, but not as toxic as pyrethroids. It is recommended cat owners avoid both types.

Never use flea spot-on treatments for dogs on your cat – this is the most common way cats are poisoned.

Cats lack the ability to metabolise permethrin (and other pyrethroids) when they come into contact with it through their skin or when they lick it off their fur while grooming. Another common way cats can be poisoned is when they have had physical contact with a dog who has recently been flea treated. When flea treating your dog, keep them away from your cat for at least 72 hours.

What are the signs of permethrin poisoning?

The permethrin chemical affects the cat's nervous system causing tremors/shaking, twitching, drooling, oversensitivity to touch and sound, ataxia (loss of coordination) and in severe cases, seizures or fits. In many cases, a cat treated promptly by a vet will make a full recovery. Sadly, more severely affected cats can die or need to be euthanased. Some cats may require extended (3-7 days) hospitalisation in a 24- hour care facility.

How can you prevent your cat from being poisoned?

- Avoid using over the counter (supermarket) flea or tick products. Veterinary prescribed treatments are more effective and safer for pets
- Never use a dog product/medicine/shampoo on your cat or cats
- If you own both dogs and cats, only use a dog flea and tick product that does not contain permethrin (a common pyrethroid in products for dogs) and use a different product on your cat
- Carefully read the 'active ingredients' of insecticide and garden pest products before using around your home/garden. It is very important to read the fine print because some products contain permethrin or other pyrethroids while claiming to be 100% natural, which gives consumers the impression the product is safe
- Check with pest control operators the products they use before spraying your home. Unfortunately permethrin is often billed as 'safe' by pest control operators because its toxicity in other mammals is not as great as it is in cats.

If you are unsure about a particular product call your vet for advice.

Other types of pyrethroids found in household and garden insecticide products include: Allethrin; Bifenthrin; Cyfluthrin; Cypermethrin; Cyphenothrin; Deltamethrin; Esfenvalerate; Etofenprox; Fenpropathrin; Fenvalerate; Flumethrin; Imiprothrin; lambda-Cyhalothrin; Metofluthrin; Phenothrin; Prallethrin; Resmethrin; Silafluofen; Sumithrin; tau-Fluvalinate; Tefluthrin; Tetramethrin; Tralomethrin; Transfluthrin.

Additionally, both pyrethrins and pyrethroids are often formulated with oils or petroleum distillates and packaged in combination with synergists such as piperonyl butoxide. Synergists are added to increase potency and length of effectiveness of insecticides and therefore increase the product's toxicity.

If you think your cat has been poisoned contact your vet immediately.

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