

PETS AND RODENTICIDES DON'T MIX.

The weather is getting cooler and drier making our houses and sheds much more welcoming for rodents (rats and mice) in particular. As a result there has been a large increase in the number of pets presented to local vets with rodenticide (rat bait) poisonings. If you are trying to control rodents, you need to do so with a little thought. The danger to pets with rodenticides comes from either primary poisoning or from secondary poisoning.

Primary poisoning is caused when a pet eats the rat bait directly. The commonest way this occurs is when a pet gets into a container of bait that has been incorrectly stored.

Secondary poisoning is different. It occurs when an animal eats a poisoned rat or mouse. The residue of bait in the rodent's stomach is the cause of the toxicity. Often this occurs when an affected rodent, slower and more lethargic than a normal one and thereby less able to defend itself, falls victim to a dog or cat.

There are many rat poisons on the market, and some are safer for pets than others. No matter which rat poison you use, be especially aware that all of them pose some danger to pets. This danger can be minimised by the careful choice of baits, by using effective baiting procedures and by ensuring you store baits safely.

Most rat baits that you can get from the supermarket are based on anticoagulants, which are chemicals that prevent the blood from clotting. The oldest anticoagulant bait is based on the chemical warfarin. *Ratsak* is the most commonly recognised. Another readily available rodenticide is based on the chemical coumatetralyl available as the Bayer product *Racumin*. Both warfarin and coumatetralyl are multi-feed rodenticides. This means that the rat must eat these types of baits over several days to become affected by them. This means that pets are less at risk because they either have to consume a large quantity of bait in one sitting or consume small quantities of bait over a long period.

Single feed rodenticides act more quickly. These rat baits are more toxic to rats and pets and a single dose is more likely to cause poisoning. Single feed rodenticides are those containing brodifacoum (e.g. *Talon*) and bromadiolone (e.g. *Bromakil*). Brodifacoum is at least 40 times more potent than warfarin and is much more likely to cause the death of a rat or a pet with a single feed. Secondary poisoning is also more likely to occur because a rat can have enough bait in its stomach to poison a dog.

If a pet is affected by an anticoagulant poison, the signs of the toxicity may not be evident for several days. The main signs of such toxicity relate to anaemia from blood loss. The blood can be lost from many areas of the body but commonly it is seen in bloodstained faeces, blood appearing in the saliva or appearing from the nose. Breathlessness, from blood pooling in the chest cavity, is a common sign also.

Weakness is very common and the gums and tongue are usually very pale due to blood loss and the resultant anaemia.

Your veterinarian will treat your pet with Vitamin K and other medications and if the condition is caught early enough, treatment is usually effective, particularly so with the multi-feed rodenticides

To minimise the risk of accidental poisoning of pets, the baits should be placed in areas that are accessible only to the rodents. Rat baits should be stored in their own container which itself is placed inside another sealed container out of reach of pets and children.

Poisons and pets don't mix. No matter what rat poison you use, it is dangerous and needs to be used with utmost caution. If you think your pet has eaten some rat bait, see your veterinarian urgently.

Dr. David Amos and Dr Tina Habermann