

Human Food Hazards



#3 in a Series of Eight

Onions

What they're in: The small amount of garlic sometimes found in dog treats is unlikely to be harmful to dogs. However, if cats or dogs ingest a tasty pan of sautéed onions, garlic, or leeks, poisoning may result. The ingestion of large amounts of garlic pills or powder may also cause poisoning. Garlic was once thought of as a “home remedy” for flea infestations; however, it has been shown to be ineffective and is not recommended by Pet Poison Helpline.

Threat to pets: These vegetables can cause red blood cell destruction (specifically, Heinz body formation) and result in anemia. Ingestion of onions or garlic greater than 0.5 percent of a dog's body weight is potentially toxic. For example, this equates to a 30-pound dog ingesting about 2.5 ounces of onion or garlic. Cats and Japanese breeds of dogs (Akita, Shiba Inu) are even more sensitive to the effects of these plants.

Signs: Onion or garlic smell on breath, lethargy, pale mucus membranes due to anemia, tachypnea (elevated respiratory rate), tachycardia (elevated heart rate), vomiting, and a reduced appetite. Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) is rare but possible.

Treatment: Induce vomiting and then administer multiple doses of activated charcoal to decontaminate (adsorb and remove toxins). Check packed cell volume or blood smears daily to evaluate anemia. If anemia is severe, initiate blood transfusions. You can also administer intravenous dextrose (sugar) if needed.

Prognosis: Excellent with early intervention and appropriate care.