

What's safe for humans isn't always safe for pets. Each year, nearly half of the calls to Pet Poison Helpline are from pet owners and veterinarians concerning pets that have ingested potentially toxic human medications. Utilizing information from a recent report that details the top selling human medications, the veterinarians and pharmacists at Pet Poison Helpline offer this information about the potential dangers these drugs pose.

For an interview with one of Pet Poison Helpline's veterinarians regarding this or any pet-related topic, please contact me.

My best,

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Top 5 Selling Human Medications and What Happens When Pets Eat Them**

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. (May 23, 2011) – The IMS Institute for Healthcare Informatics recently released a [report](#) that included the top five human prescription (Rx) drugs dispensed in the United States.

“Nearly half of the calls we receive are for pets that have accidentally ingested human medications,” said Dr. Justine Lee, DVM, DACVECC and the associate director of Veterinary Services at Pet Poison Helpline. “Recognizing the most commonly prescribed drugs in the U.S. and how they affect pets can help pet owners be more cognizant of potential dangers associated with these drugs.”

Pet Poison Helpline is a division of SafetyCall International, the world's largest industry poison control and adverse event management center, handling both human and animal calls. The

veterinarians and pharmacists work side-by-side to provide multi-disciplinary expertise to the veterinarians and pet owners they assist.

According to the IMS Institute for Healthcare Informatics report, which was released in April 2011, the top five human drugs dispensed in the U.S. are Lipitor®, Nexium®, Plavix®, Advair Diskus® and Abilify®. Because Pet Poison Helpline's call volume is high for dogs and cats that have ingested [human medications harmful to pets](#), the veterinarians are sharing how these drugs typically affect pets that ingest them. As explained below, some drugs cause only minor symptoms and some can be potentially life threatening. Awareness of these drugs and how they affect pets can save lives. Likewise, in cases where a pet has ingested a non-life threatening drug, awareness can save the pet owner a great deal of heartache.

#### #1 – Lipitor® (atorvastatin)

Used to reduce cholesterol levels, U.S. citizens spent \$7.2 billion on Lipitor in 2010, making it the top selling drug in the country. Generally when pets get into Lipitor, only mild side effects are seen, such as vomiting and diarrhea. Therefore, Lipitor is not considered to have high toxicity levels for pets. While some human drugs are utilized in veterinary medicine, Lipitor is not.

#### #2 – Nexium® (esomeprazole)

During 2010, Americans spent \$6.3 billion on Nexium. It is an anti-ulcer medication and proton-pump inhibitor that results in decreased gastric acid secretion. While it is utilized in veterinary medicine for some pets, mild side effects can include vomiting and diarrhea. Pet owners of dogs or cats that get into this drug should watch their pet closely, but not be alarmed since symptoms will generally subside on their own.

#### #3 – Plavix® (clopidogrel)

In third place is Plavix, which is a drug that affects platelets in humans, inhibiting clot formation and reducing the risk of stroke. Rarely used in veterinary medicine, \$6.1 billion was spent on this drug for humans last year. When pets get into Plavix, it has a wide margin of safety and generally is not considered to be acutely toxic. Only mild vomiting or diarrhea may be seen.

#### #4 – Advair Diskus® (fluticasone propionate and salmeterol)

Often used for treating asthma and administered through an inhaler, Advair Diskus contains beta-agonist drugs that expand the lungs and steroids that decrease inflammation in the lungs.

Americans spent \$4.7 billion on Advair Diskus in 2010, making it fourth top selling drug.

Because inhalers contain many doses, dogs that chew into them are exposed to massive amounts of the drug all at once. This often results in heart arrhythmias, an elevated heart rate, agitation, vomiting and even acute collapse. Severe electrolyte abnormalities such as very low potassium levels are likely and can be life-threatening without immediate veterinary treatment.

#### #5 – Abilify® (aripiprazole)

The fifth top-selling drug is Abilify. It contains aripiprazole, an atypical antipsychotic agent that is used to treat schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and clinical depression. It is important to keep this drug out of the reach of pets, as ingestion can result in profound lethargy, vomiting, hyperthermia, significant changes in heart rate and blood pressure, and seizures. If a pet ingests this drug, immediate veterinary attention is needed.

In order to keep pets safe from ingesting these and other dangerous human medications, the veterinarians at Pet Poison Helpline offer these recommendations.

- Keep human medications stored in a different location from pet medications. Pet Poison Helpline often takes calls from pet owners who accidentally give their human medications to pets.
- Weekly pill holders are irresistible to some dogs, as they resemble chew toys and rattle. The danger is that a dog could ingest a full seven days' worth of medications, significantly increasing the risk for poisoning.
- Avoid putting medications into plastic storage baggies before traveling – these are not pet proof (or child-proof), and can easily be chewed into by dogs.
- Hang your purse out of the reach of your pets. Inhalers, medications, sugar-free gum, and other items that are dangerous to pets can be easily snatched out of a purse by a curious dog or cat. Pet Poison Helpline recently produced a video titled “Handbag Hazards” available here <http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/Ask-the-Vet-Videos>.

Remember that what is safe for humans isn't always safe for pets. If you think your pet has ingested something poisonous, it is always better (and less expensive) to get help immediately. Contact your veterinarian or **Pet Poison Helpline** at 1-800-213-6680 for life-saving help. Pet Poison Helpline is the most cost-effective animal poison control center in North America charging only \$35 per call, including unlimited follow-up consultations.

### **About Pet Poison Helpline**

[Pet Poison Helpline™](#), a division of [SafetyCall International®](#), is an animal poison control service based out of Minneapolis available 24 hours, seven days a week for pet owners and veterinary professionals who require assistance treating a potentially poisoned pet. The staff can provide treatment advice for poisoning cases of all species, including dogs, cats, birds, small mammals, large animals and exotic species. As the most cost-effective option for animal poison control care, Pet Poison Helpline's fee of \$35 per incident includes unlimited follow-up consultations. Pet Poison Helpline is available in North America by calling 800-213-6680. Additional information can be found online at [www.petpoisonhelpline.com](http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com).

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