

What to Expect From Your Veterinarian When Investigating a Pet's Exposure to a Lawn Care Product

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Household pets can be exposed to products that are applied to lawns to control insects and weeds and provide nutrients to plants. In general, these products are safe when used according to label directions but, occasionally, pets are exposed to potentially toxic amounts of these products when spills occur or when they are used improperly. Sometimes there is concern about the relationship between a properly applied lawn care product and a concurrent illness (most often unrelated) of a pet. When a pet becomes ill and lawn care products are thought to be the cause, a veterinarian is often consulted. The following are steps that you can expect your veterinarian to take to investigate an illness believed to be associated with exposure to a lawn care product:

- Your veterinarian will ask you to identify what products were used. He/she should ask you to either bring in the product container or to write down what ingredients the product contains and their concentrations. You may have to ask the lawn care service provider for such information if you do not have a product container available or your veterinarian may have to contact a poison control center.
- If your veterinarian is unfamiliar with the product or its active ingredient(s) (AI), he/she will attempt to find out what the product's AI is/are, information regarding their toxicity, and what type(s) of illness would be expected following exposure. This may necessitate calling the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Hotline (1-800-858-7378) or specialists such as toxicologists or animal poison control personnel. The one animal poison control center in the U.S. does charge a consulting fee for its advice.
- If your animal is severely ill, the veterinarian will often need to provide immediate treatment before being able to find out specific information regarding a lawn care product, or ask you more information about the pet. Immediate treatment is required when the pet has a life-threatening illness and needs to be stabilized prior to undertaking additional procedures. If exposure to a product can be confirmed, your veterinarian may take steps to prevent the material from being absorbed (e.g., a bath may be given following dermal exposure, or an adsorbent such as activated charcoal can be given orally to bind and reduce the absorption of the AI that has been ingested).
- When appropriate, your veterinarian will ask you a number of questions regarding the pet and its environment, and perform a variety of diagnostic tests to help him/her more accurately identify a cause for the pet's illness, exactly as your own physician does when you become ill. In some circumstances, your veterinarian will collect blood or urine samples to submit to an outside laboratory for specialized testing.
- Depending on the situation, your pet may have to remain in the veterinary hospital for observation, treatment, or performance of diagnostic tests.
- Your veterinarian should discuss with you his/her plan for diagnosing what may be causing the illness of your pet, the results of any diagnostic tests, and the approach for treating your pet. The costs of testing or treatment should be discussed before they are undertaken.
- In the unfortunate event that your pet dies, your veterinarian will ask you if you are willing to have a postmortem examination conducted on your pet. This can be a very difficult decision to make, but it is often the only way that the ultimate cause for the pet's illness can be determined. The cost of a postmortem examination is quite variable depending on the resources that are available in the area and the extent of testing that is needed.

Unfortunately, in some situations, especially if diagnostic tests cannot be performed, the cause for a pet's illness is never determined. Again, it is important to point out that commonly used lawn care products are considered to be safe when used appropriately. The vast majority of pet illnesses believed to be associated with exposure to lawn care products are, in fact, due to other diseases.