

CONCENTRATED LAUNDRY LIQUID TOXICITY

Following an incident in which 4 Burmese cats suffered serious injury (including one fatality) following contact with accidental spillage of Persil concentrated laundry liquid, I would like to warn cat owners and veterinary surgeons of the danger of all brands of concentrated laundry liquid for pets.

The high concentration of chemicals in these products is extremely irritant to skin and mucous membranes. Skin contact can result in serious burns and if the liquid is ingested it will cause severe irritation of the lining of the gastro-intestinal and respiratory tracts. Cats are especially at risk because of their instinctive tendency to remove any contamination from their fur by licking.

The more costly branded concentrated laundry liquids containing 15-30% anionic detergents are particularly dangerous. Cheaper products containing 5-15% anionic detergents are less dangerous but still irritant.

The UK Veterinary Poisons Information Service (VPIS) has records of 78 cases with follow up involving liquid detergent exposure in cats. Of these 10 cats were asymptomatic, 6.4% of cases were fatal (3 died, 2 euthanized), 4 cats had on-going signs at the time of follow up and 59 cats recovered fully (75.6%). In total, 53% of symptomatic cats had respiratory signs, 50% of symptomatic cats had gastrointestinal signs and 22% of symptomatic cats had dermal signs.

If you suspect your cat has had contact with such a product contact your vet immediately. If they are unaware of the effects of the products show them this article and ask that they contact VPIS who provide a 24 hour service to help veterinary surgeons manage poisoning cases.

VPIS advice for management of exposure in a cat or dog would be prompt and thorough decontamination. Contaminated skin should be washed in lukewarm running water for up to 30 minutes. A buster type collar should be considered to prevent self grooming. It would also be important to check for any ocular exposure. Any skin or eye irritation or burns should be treated supportively. There is also the risk of respiratory problems as these products can cause chemical pneumonitis if in contact with lung tissue. This is probably most likely if the patient vomits, as the vomitus can be frothy and foamy and easily inhaled. Treatment is entirely symptomatic and supportive.

Although these are good products when used correctly please be aware of the danger to pets as well as children and take great care to store them safely. Always mop up any spillages immediately, screw bottle cap on tightly and wipe any excess liquid from the outside of the bottle. Never allow your cat to play with a liquid as they are easily pierced by sharp feline teeth. Do not leave bottles on a work top where your cat can knock it on the floor as bottles/lids can split. If your cat is clever at opening cupboards consider fitting a child proof catch.

Please also remember that many other household products are also irritant/toxic to cats. Common examples are bleach products, shower cleaner, oven cleaner and lime scale remover. Most of these products are obviously irritant as they emit an unpleasant vapour which tends to warn the user of the potential danger. The seemingly innocuous nature of laundry liquid which has a pleasant smell does not alert the user to its irritant properties.

Always read the safety information on the packaging. Most irritant products carry the standard warning logo of a black cross on an orange rectangle. Unfortunately this is not compulsory and some well known brands of concentrated laundry liquid do not carry this label and warning messages are not displayed so clearly.

ANY PRODUCT LABELLED AS IRRITANT TO HUMANS WILL ALSO BE IRRITANT TO PETS

FURTHER INFORMATION

Veterinary Poisons Information Centre <http://www.vpisuk.co.uk/portal/>

VPIS Emergency Telephone Number (Vets only) : **020 7188 0200**

NB: The VPIS is primarily a service for vets. They do NOT take calls from the general public. However there is some useful owner information on the website.

HUMAN POISONING

There are a large number of reports of poisoning in children which is of great concern. It is important that people also realize that cats, dogs and small mammalian pets are similarly sensitive to the irritant effects of these products.

LINKS

Pub Med Reference

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22835052>

News Articles

<http://www.ksdk.com/news/article/320603/3/Warning-for-parents-Children-eat-concentrated-laundry-detergent>

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2012/5/prweb9521404.htm>

<http://consumer.healthday.com/Article.asp?AID=668356>

<http://www.aapcc.org/alerts/laundry-detergent-packets/>

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