



Pets are notorious for getting into things they are not supposed to and marijuana is no exception. Exposures are all too common in states like California and others where medical marijuana is legal, thus increasing exposure risk to pets. But picking up a small amount on a walk through the neighborhood or a local park happens routinely as well. Fortunately, THC (the active component of marijuana) has a high margin of safety when ingested, making the risk for serious complications in pets very low.

What happens when my pets ingests marijuana?

Pets typically begin to show signs associated with marijuana exposure within an hour, with the most common including depression, incoordination, dilated pupils, a glazed appearance, sound/light sensitivity and sometimes urine leakage. Depending on the dose, signs may last for as little as a few hours up to several days, with the average being about 24 hours in duration.

I think my pet ingested marijuana but I'm not sure. Can you test for it?

All of the tests available for bedside drug screening are human products. Since dogs process the marijuana into several forms not present in humans, the urine drug screen test may not find it, even if we know that a pet has ingested marijuana. Another reason it may not be found is that the test is performed too soon after ingestion and the processed marijuana is not yet in the urine. If the test is positive, it is a very good indicator that THC is present. While definitive testing is available at veterinary toxicology labs, results take several days to return which makes it impractical in most circumstances.

So my pet got into marijuana, what do we do about it?

Fortunately, nearly all pets with exposure to marijuana simply need time to allow the effects to wear off. Treatments done either as an outpatient or during a brief hospital stay include placement in a quiet area, hydration support, and relief of nausea, if present. If a pet ingests so much marijuana that they are severely depressed to comatose, they are definitely hospitalized and placed on IV fluids. More advanced therapies like IV lipids and oxygen support can also be considered in severe cases.

Has a dog or cat ever died from marijuana exposure?

There are two reported cases of dogs ingesting marijuana-infused butter that subsequently died with the suspicion that it was related to the intoxication. THC dissolves readily in fats (like butter) which means dogs only need to ingest a small amount of butter to receive a large amount of THC.

Are there any permanent effects?

No, fortunately. Dogs typically recover with no long-term adverse effects.