



Poisoned!

What to do when your dog is poisoned by Criminals

This guide dedicated to the memory of Misha, who died at the hands of criminals who poisoned him on the 8th of August, 2011, at the age of 14 months.

The research I was doing for this document was tested when the same criminals returned a month later to complete a job interrupted. Thankfully, we were able to save Ludwig, the Blood Hound, without any complications.

I sincerely hope that this guide will help others save their dogs when the unthinkable happens.

Poisoned!

What to do when your dog is poisoned by criminals

This is not a pleasant topic, but it is something you should take seriously. My intention in sharing this with you is to prepare you for the possibility and to give you the best possible chance to save your dog, should the need ever arise.

The poisoning of dogs, as a precursor to further crimes such as burglary, robbery, rape, etc., is extremely common in South Africa. Yet there is very little organised information available to dog owners.

Like most dog owners in this situation, I only learnt a bit about dealing with poisoning after my dogs and I became victims. Unfortunately, for us that was too little, too late!

I am focusing on criminal poisoning only. There are numerous common substances in and around the house that can be dangerous to your dog. These include chocolate, raisins, onion, all household medicines, and of course household detergents and insecticides. Prevention is always better than cure! Be informed, careful, and prepared.

You should note that first aid procedures for other poisonous substances may be quite different from those proposed herein.

Ask your vet before you act. These first aid measures may not be appropriate for other animals.

Which poisons?

The most common poisons used are organophosphates and carbamate (Aldicarb, Temik, also known as Two-Step).

Rat poison is another commonly used option.

Both organophosphates and carbamate are insecticides used predominantly in agricultural applications, but household applications also exist. Temik is the most commonly used poison, but it may be combined with other poisons. It is extremely toxic and as such it is a restricted substance; its distribution and use highly regulated. Unfortunately these measures are clearly ineffective. Organophosphates are relatively common insecticides, appearing in household insect sprays, rose and fruit tree sprays, etc. Interestingly, organophosphates were originally developed as biological weapons, and American soldiers are routinely issued with atropine and 2-PAM injection kits when going into areas where chemical weapons are deemed to be a risk! The rat poison that is used will probably contain anticoagulants (blood thinners), but may also contain a wide variety of other poisons. The anticoagulants often don't work as quickly as any of the other poisons, building up in the animal's body over a period of a few days. This does however not mean that your dog needs to consume more of it. Most poisons, with the exception of the rat poisons, are formulated so that they have a bad taste as a means of discouraging ingestion. Unfortunately, when these formulations are considered, the manufacturers have humans in mind. Anyone who has spent some time observing animals will know that a sufficiently motivated animal will ignore a bad taste.

Identification and presentation

Temik is easily identified. It is in the form of tiny black or bluish/grey granules, similar to gunpowder. Most rat poisons appear in pelleted or caked form. Other poisons are more difficult to identify as there is a greater variety. All poisons are presented to the dogs with food. Common presentations include polony, meat, fish, maize meal, or bread: all rolled in, or stuffed with the poison. I have also come across bones covered in a fatty substance.

Signs and symptoms

These poisons are extremely fast acting (excepting some of the anticoagulants) and deadly, even if your dog only ingested a small amount. Even if you catch your dog in the act of ingesting the poison, there is no time to waste. Don't wait for your dog to display symptoms. Take action immediately.

The following symptoms may appear, listed in no particular order:

- ☒ Profuse twitching of the skin
- ☒ Bruising in the case of anticoagulants
- ☒ Pallor
- ☒ Confusion
- ☒ Excessive bronchial secretion, i.e. coughing up slime
- ☒ Hyperventilation
- ☒ Weakness
- ☒ Lethargy
- ☒ Anxiety
- ☒ Convulsions
- ☒ Posture abnormalities, i.e. body contorted into abnormal Positions
- ☒ Abnormal pupils – either pinpoint or dilated
- ☒ Tremors and muscle twitching movement
- ☒ Unconsciousness
- ☒ Disorientation
- ☒ Vomiting, which may include blood in case of anticoagulant poisoning.
- ☒ Excessive salivation
- ☒ Excessively runny nose
- ☒ Restlessness
- ☒ Somnolence
- ☒ Dyspnoea, i.e. difficulty breathing
- ☒ Nervousness
- ☒ Seizures
- ☒ Diarrhoea: may be mucous; may be black the case of anticoagulant poisoning
- ☒ Abdominal pain
- ☒ Temporary or partial paralysis, partial loss of
- ☒ Coma

☒ Bleeding, from nose, gums, wounds in the case of Anticoagulants

☒ Acute blindness in the case of anticoagulants
☒ Blood in the urine in the case of anticoagulants

Emergency Response Procedure:-

The faster you act, the better your dog's chances. Nonetheless, you should know that there are no guarantees. Make sure you have your vet's number saved on your cell and in a prominent place in your home. Since most poisonings happen at night, make sure your vet is available 24/7/365. If not, find an alternative vet who is available at any time for emergencies and establish a relationship with the practice. In any event it is a good idea to have a back-up vet on your list of contacts.

Steps 1 to 4 are vital initial procedures that must be undertaken immediately.

- 1 As soon as you suspect that your dog has been poisoned, have someone phone the vet to let them know that you are on your way. If you are alone, phone the vet between the following actions. Remain calm and focus on what you need to do.
- 2 Remember that poisonings seldom happen for their own sake: they are a preparatory step for a further crime. Alert your security company and the police immediately.
- 3 Immediately remove your dog and any other animals and children from the source of the poison. If it means confining your dog in the house, do so. If you can, use a room or courtyard that has little furniture or objects on which your dog could injure itself. If you have to go indoors choose a place with a tiled floor if you can.
- 4 If your dog is conscious, not having seizures and is not having difficulty breathing, one should induce vomiting (step 5).

If at any point during the process your dog develops any of these symptoms, stop and rush your dog to the vet immediately. If you have tried inducing vomiting (whether by washing powder or multitudes of milk) without success for at the most ten minutes without success, stop and rush your dog to the vet. Make sure that the dog does not re-ingest the vomit. If you can, inspect the vomit visually for signs of the poison – it may be helpful if you can describe it firstly to your vet, and later to the police. The following methods are most effective:

- 5 Force a ball of high foam washing powder down its throat. Prepare the ball with washing powder and a little water. The amount should be in relation to the size of the dog.
- 6 In the case of rat poison, proceed directly to the vet.
- 7 Get your dog into the car and rush to the vet, if your dog is having convulsions, or is lethargic, somnolent, or unconscious, use a blanket or something similar as a stretcher. Be careful carrying a dog with convulsions as you might get bitten accidentally.
- 8 Tell the vet what you have done from discovering the poisoning up to the point of entering the practice. Also try to remember when the poisoning was discovered, what symptoms presented and when, as well as your subjective judgement of how much of the poison your dog ingested, based on what you saw of the stomach content.

What to expect:-

If your dog survives the initial crisis and your vet got it through the first 12 hours, you may see:

- 1 A quick recovery, if you are lucky. Your dog will continue to cough for a few days, be teary-eyed, and may be a bit weak, and will need to eat bland food (i.e. rice and boiled, unseasoned chicken) for a few days to give the liver a chance to recover fully. You may observe some long term impact which may, or may not, improve with time, depending on which systems were damaged by the poison. Your dog may thus require ongoing supportive treatment.
- 2 Persistence of some of the symptoms, specifically hypersalivation, slow heart rate, diarrhoea: often mucous due to glandular over-secretion, vomiting, contraction of the pupils, central nervous system stimulation with hyperactivity, mania, anxiety or depression, seizures, difficulty breathing, Increased bronchial secretions. These are referred to as the Muscarinic effect of the poison. While treatment for this effect is available, the effectiveness thereof depends on the severity of the poisoning.
- 3 Your dog may also experience muscle twitching under the skin, but this may progress to muscle weakness and partial inability to move and respiratory paralysis. These symptoms may initially be masked by anxiety and

stress associated with the Muscarinic effect. They often only manifest clearly after 36 to 72 hours and are referred to as the Nicotinic effect of the poison. This is one of the most dangerous parts of the poison process's progression and many dogs die of paralysis of respiratory system.

4 Throughout the dog's treatment, even though you may observe apparent improvement, there is the risk of organ damage or failure, which may lead to the dog's death.

The Aftermath

Prepare yourself for the worst. If your dog recovers, you can count yourself and your dog lucky. Even if your response time was excellent, there is no guarantee that your dog will survive.

1 You need to report the poisoning to the police. All police stations in South Africa have been instructed on poisonings, but you may still meet resistance when attempting to open a case. Here are specific charges you may lay:

1.1 Contravention of Section 2(1)(n), alternatively Section 2(1)(d) of the Animal Protection Act, Act 71 of 1962, as

amended: Administer poisonous substance to animal AND In the case of Carbamate (Aldicarb – Temik/Sanacarb/two-step)

1.2 Contravention of the Fertilisers, Farm Feeds, Agriculture Remedies and Stock Remedies Act, Act 36 of 1947, as amended: Possession of an illegal substance, AND

1.3 Hazardous Substances Act, Act 15 of 1973, as amended: Possession of an illegal substance

In order to make these charges stick, you need to make sure the police get a sample of the poison. Carefully collect any leftover poison from the garden or, if there is nothing there, collect a sample from the vomit (preferably with visible samples of the poisoned substance) and keep it in the fridge until you can hand it over. You can also give a copy of the vet's bill, which will be quite substantial, to the police. It will help to substantiate the damage caused in monetary terms. This is of course wholly inadequate as a measure of the real damage, but it's something concrete one can use in court.

Cleaning up:

2 You need to clean up. This will be one of the most difficult tasks you'll ever have to undertake. Not only is it a messy job, it is an emotional one! Here is what you need to do:

2.1 Protect yourself from the poison: It is just as poisonous to you as it is to your dog. Wear rubber gloves, wear protective clothing, wear decent shoes. Remember: the poison can be ingested, inhaled, and absorbed through the skin. Do not smoke, eat or drink, rub your eyes, or handle any uncontaminated household articles before

changing clothes and thoroughly washing your hands, face and other exposed skin. 2.2 Restrict access to all contaminated areas, regardless whether it is vomit, saliva, or any other fluid or substance. This means no children, no visitors, and no other pets; only the person who is going to clean up should be allowed in. 2.3

Collect all remaining poison from the place where the dog was poisoned. Seal it in decent plastic containers. Sprinkle Slaked Lime over the area and water down the entire area extremely well. Also water down any run-off very well. You want to remove all remnants of the poison from the surface.

2.4 Collect all the solid waste as well as severely soiled articles and seal all in plastic containers.

2.5 Wash everything that was in contact with the poison, including any excretions from your dog. A 10% solution of Sodium Carbonate is recommended. Brush the solution well into the entire area and leave for at least 8 hours. Wash off and absorb the water into an absorbent material. Wood-based cat litter pellets work really well — a little absorbs a lot of water and it's easy to collect afterwards. Do not dispose of in the drain; dispose of as described below. Wash again with a strong household detergent and dry with an absorbent material. Do not dispose of washing water in the drain or garden! Remember to wash window sills, walls, doors and door frames, legs of furniture, etc.

2.6 All washable rugs, table cloths, cushions, etc. should be washed thoroughly by machine – remember to remove and collect all solid waste before washing. Use a strong oxidising detergent such as "Vanish".

3 Dispose of the waste:

3.1a If you are in a municipal area, your municipality should be able to handle toxic waste. Contact them in connection with the collected waste. Alternatively contact a reputable toxic waste disposal company for

assistance.

3.1b If you are in a rural area:

Do Not dispose of anything into the septic tank since you'll poison everything downstream of the French drain. Aldicarb/Temik: bury the contaminated material at least 45cm deep (make sure no animal will be able to dig the stuff up again), in excess of 50m away from wells, French drains, trenches and water runs. Mix an equal mass of Soda Ash (Sodium Carbonate) or Slaked Lime (Calcium Hydroxide) into the material. Soak well with water.

Backfill. Organophosphates: Burn all collected materials and absorbent material used in washing in a place where no ground or water contamination by smoke or ash can take place. Collect the ash, mix with equal mass Soda Ash, and bury as above. Only burn if you are sure that no Aldicarb/Temik was used, otherwise bury everything as above.

Rat Poison: it is difficult to recommend a disposal method without knowing what is in it.

3.1c If in any doubt, contact your nearest Poison Information Centre.

4 If at any time during the clean-up process, you or a family member feels ill, don't hesitate: go see a medical professional. There is a real possibility that you may have been exposed to too much of the poison and may be experiencing symptoms of poisoning yourself.

Resources

It is really difficult to find decent, and specifically complete, information on poisoning for the layperson. Here are a few sources I found useful. If you know of a source that provides decent information, please let me know.

Huskyrescue.co.za First Aid: http://www.huskyrescue.co.za/need_to_know/first_aid.php, INCHEM Chemical Safety Information from Intergovernmental Organizations: <http://www.inchem.org>

INCHEM Organophosphates: <http://www.inchem.org/documents/pims/chemical/pimg001.htm#PartTitle:12.%20ADDITIONAL%20INFORMATION>

Organophosphate and carbamate toxicities: <http://www.edoc.co.za/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=964>

Toxipedia: <http://www.toxipedia.org> Wikipedia: <http://www.wikipedia.org>

Workingdogs.com has an excellent article on poisonings. A vast variety of poisons, including household items, and treatments is discussed. Go to <http://www.workingdogs.com/doc0175.htm>. If you don't get to the page directly,

search for it using the search term "Poisoned!" under the "Articles" heading; it's worth the effort.

Disclaimer

I am not a veterinarian, medical professional, or an expert on poisons. The information presented herein was gathered from product information documentation, information on the internet I deem trustworthy (most of the references are reflected above), and interviews with a few knowledgeable individuals whom have been through the ordeal themselves. I have taken every care to ensure the accuracy of the information presented herein. The intent is to help give the reader a better chance at successfully saving their dog in the event of a poisoning with the poisons specified herein. I do not give any guarantees, even though I wish I could. I cannot accept any responsibility whatsoever for the effect of the application of the first aid measures suggested herein since the application thereof will be beyond my control and subject to the judgement of the person applying the said measures.