

Garbage Intoxication/Food Poisoning in Dogs and Cats

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Toxin

Food poisoning caused by bacteria including *Escherichia coli*, *Staphylococcus*, *Streptococcus*, *Salmonella* spp., *Bacillus* spp., *Clostridium perfringens*, and *Clostridium botulinum*, or Penitrem-A (a neurotoxin).

Source

Ingestion of decomposing carrion, garbage, spoiled food, and compost. Ingestion of moldy nuts, food, or grains can cause exposure to Penitrem-A.

General Information

Ingestion of these types of substances by dogs is not uncommon. Cats tend to be more selective about what they eat. Once ingested, these substances alter the GI motility and permeability as well as produce CNS signs due to the endotoxin release from the dead bacteria. Each species of bacteria affects the body in a different way, but all can produce potentially life-threatening diseases affecting multiple body organs.

Penitrem-A is a neurotoxin which affects nerves by causing uncontrolled firing of the nerves that cause muscle movement. This causes muscle injury, muscle cell breakdown, and hyperthermia. This action is very similar to that of [strychnine](#).

Toxic Dose

Undetermined

Signs

Signs of garbage intoxication from bacteria typically begin within 3 hours of ingestion. They include vomiting, diarrhea which may become bloody, dehydration, fever, and signs of endotoxic shock which include depression, hypotension, collapse, either rapid or slow [capillary refill time](#), hypothermia or hyperthermia, and decrease in urine production.

Signs of botulism include vomiting, drooling, abdominal pain, dry eyes, and rear limb weakness. Certain reflexes of the tendons, eyes, and throat are depressed.

Signs of Penitrem-A toxicity include panting, restlessness, drooling, incoordination, fine muscle tremors of the head and neck which progress to the entire body, tonic spasms, hyperthermia, ataxia, seizures, and death. The muscle spasms may be worsened by external stimuli similar to, but not as consistent as with, strychnine intoxication.

Immediate Action

Seek veterinary attention. The pet has probably already emptied the stomach by vomiting. Inducing vomiting is generally contraindicated since excessive vomiting is a symptom of this disorder that typically requires treatment.

Veterinary Care

General treatment: Gastric lavage is performed, and [activated charcoal](#) is administered.

Supportive treatment: IV fluids are administered to maintain hydration, oxygen, and antiemetics. Seizures and tremors are treated with medication. The patient may be treated with other types of fluids also especially if showing signs of shock. Antibiotics are administered.

Specific treatment: Administering botulism antitoxin to patients with suspected botulism.

Prognosis

Guarded, depending on the severity of signs at time treatment begins and the exact toxin.