



Missouri German Shepherd Rescue (MoGS)  
Doggie Health & Wellness Team  
**Wellness Wednesday Series on Canine Health**

## The Dangers of Keeping Rat Poisons in the Home



Now that temperatures outside are cold many people are purchasing rat or mouse baits to place around the home to help reduce the pest population inside. While these poisons were developed to kill rats and mice in the home, they can just as easily be toxic for our other furry family members. Animals are being brought into the emergency vet frequently because of accidental ingestion of mouse baits. The Missouri German Shepherd Rescue experienced such an event and it has been a learning experience for everyone. We acquired 6-7 week old Simba from a local shelter as a result of a drug raid confiscation. Soon after he was in our care he started crying out in pain and bleeding from the mouth, so we rushed him to the emergency vet where they suspected that he had probably eaten rat bait prior to being seized. It took a blood transfusion, constant monitoring, and a month long treatment of Vitamin K tablets to reverse the effects the poison had on his fragile body.





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There are several types of rat/mouse poisons on the market and each has its own unique mode of action:

- **Anticoagulant** (the type we suspect poor Simba got ahold of)
  - Examples: D-Con, WARF 42, Ratron, Bromadiolone, warfarin
  - Mode of action: inhibits the enzymes needed to produce Vitamin K clotting factors, thus preventing the blood from clotting. This causes the animal to basically bleed to death if not prevented/treated promptly.
  - Signs and Symptoms: difficulty breathing (bleeding out decreases the amount of oxygen able to circulate through the body, but blood can also leak into the chest and lungs making it difficult to breath), decreased appetite, blood in vomit or stools, bleeding from mouth or nose, bruising (petechia) especially on abdomen, ears, and gums, and death. The pictures are examples of petechia.
  - Treatment: blood transfusion and/or plasma transfusion may be needed depending on severity of the case, daily supplementation of Vitamin K1 for 30 days, and supportive care to treat any problems caused by poisoning (oxygen therapy, fluids, etc).
- **Bromethalin**
  - Examples: most TomCat products (also in mole baits)
  - Mode of Action: increases the pressure of cerebral spinal fluid and causes cerebral edema (bleeding into the brain).
  - Signs and Symptoms: muscle tremors, seizures, weakness, inability to walk, decreased appetite, paralysis, and death.
  - **There is NO antidote for this toxin.** The only thing the vet can do is to try and reduce the swelling in the brain while trying to flush the toxin out, but prognosis is usually poor if not addressed after initial ingestion.
- **Zinc Phosphahate**
  - Examples: some Bonide and Sweeny's rodenticides
  - Mode of Action: increase the gas production in stomach and intestinal tract, essentially causing bloat. Especially dangerous to animals who can't vomit.
  - Signs and Symptoms: the pet's breath will have a rotten fish or garlic odor, increased respiratory rate, weakness, seizures, distended abdomen, vomiting, and death.
    - *On a side note* – if your pet, especially larger dogs like German Shepherds, ever have a distended abdomen take them to the vet immediately. Bloat is a serious issue that needs to be addressed ASAP.





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- There also is **no antidote** for this toxin and the vet will usually try a treatment of Sodium Bicarbonate to increase the pH of the GI system and therefore attempting to reduce gas build-up/

**If you suspect that your pet has gotten into a rat bait take them to the nearest vet ASAP:**

- **Take the box** containing the bait with you. This allows the vet to confirm which toxin was ingested and may give them an idea of how much was ingested
- Please do not try to make the pet vomit at home. Unless you are hours from a vet, the safest way to cause your dog to vomit is to **allow a vet to administer drugs to cause vomiting**. Using hydrogen peroxide at home can put your pet at risk of aspirating the hydrogen peroxide or the vomit into their lungs.
- Try to figure out **when** your pet ingested the toxin and **how much**
  - Toxic doses are reached when an animal ingests a lot at one time or a little bit over several days
- **Don't wait before seeking treatment**. Most mouse baits can take 3-10 days before signs start to show, and by then it could be too late.
  - It's also cheaper to take to them to the vet to vomit upon suspected ingestion than it would be to try and treat the problems once they begin to show up.

**Preventing mouse/rat bait ingestion:**

- **DON'T BUY IT**. If you have pets in the home the best solution is to not even bring the stuff home
  - Alternative pest control solutions include snap traps, sticky traps, and live traps.
- **Ingesting a critter that has died from baits is just as poisonous as ingesting the bait itself**. If you must keep the bait in and around your home, please check the traps multiple times per day and monitor the house and yard for dead rodents.
- Even if you buy the bait and hide it somewhere out of reach of your pets, **mice and rats can still drag the bait out of its hiding spot** and to somewhere that is accessible to your pets. Again, if you must purchase baits, then put it in a room where the pet has **zero** access to.
- Also realize that the above toxins can also be found in mole killers and other pest killers (for squirrels, raccoons, etc). **Read the labels** to look for the active ingredients before purchasing any pesticides.

As always keep the phone number to the **poison control hotline** nearby in case of emergencies: **(888) 426-4435**, and know the phone number to your vet or closest emergency vet clinic.

