

Keep furry family members safe this Halloween

Courtesy of Family Features — Halloween isn't just for humans; four-legged friends have plenty of opportunity to get in on the fun, too. However, it's important to take some pet precautions that allow the whole family to enjoy the holiday safely, as the costumes and excitement can be overwhelming and some of the candy is even dangerous.

As you're filling the candy buckets and assembling the perfect costumes, be sure to heed these tips from the experts at PetSmart for a Halloween filled with pet-friendly fun:

Out and about

Make sure pets have proper identification by microchipping and registering your pet's microchip, and keeping identification and registration tags on their collars. This is especially important around Halloween, when open doors offer more opportunity for escape.

If your pet will be joining the family while trick-or-treating, be sure they are visible to motorists by using a reflective collar, harness or leash.

Costume concerns

As with children, there are safety issues to consider when costuming your pets. Not all dogs like wearing clothes and some may become stressed or agitated while wearing a costume or sweater. However, many dogs just need a little coaxing and positive reinforcement.

- Start with a simple accessory, like a bandana, working your way up to a costume.
- Make sure costumes include eye and ear holes, and if they don't,

consider removing whole portions of the costume to ensure your pet's ability to see, hear and breathe. Make sure there isn't anything that could be a tripping hazard. Also, be sure to check the costume for little parts within biting or chewing distance.

- Dogs can overheat easily, so ensure your dog's clothing is not too bulky or heavy if the weather is warm.
- In the end, the top priority should be your pet's comfort level.

Hazardous food and decorations

"It's fun to include our pets in our celebrations, but it's also important to be aware of the dangers associated with Halloween to ensure their safety," said Jennifer Freeman, DVM, PetSmart's resident veterinarian and pet care expert.

"Keep chocolate and candy out of paws' reach. Xylitol, a sugar substitute found in candy, gum, mints and baked goods,

is toxic to pets and can cause liver damage."

Keep the Halloween fun going by establishing some rules for your family and any guests joining the festivities:

- Xylitol can be extremely dangerous to pets, even in small amounts. Just 1/8 teaspoon can

cause dangerously low blood sugar in dogs and 1/2 teaspoon can cause liver damage. If xylitol is consumed by your pet, take him or her to a veterinarian immediately.

- Natural stimulants in chocolate can cause a range of symptoms like vomiting, diarrhea and abnormal heart rhythm.
- Raisins may cause a toxic reaction in dogs from vomiting to kidney failure.
- Cellophane, plastic and paper from candy wrappers and lollipop sticks can cause gastrointestinal upset.
 - As an alternative to sharing dangerous snacks, stock up on some seasonal dog-friendly treats and set out a pet-specific bowl.

Seasonal decorations can also pose a threat:

- Fall decorations like jack-o'-lanterns can cause gastrointestinal upset.
- Glow sticks can cause irritation, agitation and vomiting.
- Hot wax and flames from candles can potentially burn your pet's nose, tongue or tail.

Don't forget the fun

Despite some concerns, Halloween can still provide fun moments for your pet:

- Take your dog along for trick-or-treating.
- Allow your four-legged friend to greet trick-or-treaters at the door
- Encourage friends to dress up their pets and join the festivities.

