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Summer Time – Bufo Toads, Cane Toads or Marine Toads



About 40 years ago a giant tropical toad, *Bufo marinus*, was introduced into the southern United States and Hawaii to control the unwanted insect population. While the tactic worked well for insect control, it was later found that the toad secreted a fatal toxin. This toxin is produced in the glands on the toad's head and shoulders. Both humans and animals exposed to the substance can become intoxicated.

Known scientifically as *Bufo marinus*, the Cane Toad, Giant Toad or Marine Toad is the largest of the Florida frogs and toads. When this non-native species is threatened, it secretes a highly toxic milky substance from its large parotoid glands in the back of its head. This secretion will burn eyes, may inflame the skin, and can **kill cats and dogs if they ingest it**.

Toads seem to be more abundant in South Florida during the rainy summer months. Dogs are attracted to these slow hopping creatures, especially at dusk. Dogs often grasp or lick the toad causing the toxin to be secreted in their mouth. The toxin is rapidly absorbed through the gums and lining of the stomach. **Death can occur as fast as 15 minutes if untreated**. The symptoms of a poisoned pet vary according to the size of the pet and amount of toxin absorbed. It is, therefore, paramount to recognize the symptoms and begin treatment immediately.

The most common symptoms seen in exposed pets are:

- Gastrointestinal (i.e. bright red gums, salivation, and sometimes vomiting).
- Nervous system disorders are also frequently seen. Beginning with slight incoordination (drunkenness) these symptoms may progress rapidly to seizures.
- Heart arrhythmia, which can only be detected by electrocardiogram (EKG) are also a common and often deadly outcome of *Bufo* toad intoxication.

What you do when you first notice a problem will likely save your pet's life.

- Rinse your pet's mouth out with water. Use a garden hose if necessary, making certain **NOT** to squirt water down your pet's throat and nose.
- Soak a washcloth or towel with water and wipe the dog's mouth and gums out.
- **DO NOT HESITATE** to take your pet to the vet as soon as possible. The vet will give you further information and advice. This also allows them to have needed medications, IV fluids and equipment ready in the event your pet needs to be treated.
- **In all situations, make sure you have the number of a reputable 24 hour emergency vet hospital easily accessible.**