

Poisons – Z

Zinc



Information provided by Dr. Cecil Brownie, Veterinary Toxicologist

Poisonous to: Cats, Dogs

Level of toxicity: Generally moderate to severe, life-threatening

Common signs to watch for:

Weakness, pale gums (anemia), vomiting, increased breathing, increased heart rate, discolored urine, jaundiced gums, lack of appetite, collapse, death

Zinc poisoning can occur in dogs, cats, and birds secondary to ingesting metal pieces (e.g., nuts, bolts, hardware and other galvanized metals), certain topical ointments (e.g., diaper rash creams), or coins. While some coins can be safely ingested and passed out in the stool a few days later, some types of coins contain large amounts of zinc, resulting in zinc poisoning.

When the zinc-containing coin enters the acid environment of the stomach, the zinc breaks down, causing stomach upset and zinc absorption into the blood stream. Zinc poisoning can lead to destruction of red blood cells, liver damage, kidney failure and heart failure. Clinical signs of zinc poisoning include weakness, pale gums (anemia), vomiting, increased breathing, increased heart rate, discolored urine, jaundiced gums, lack of appetite, and collapse. Removal of the coin is important, or severe damage to the red blood cells can occur, resulting in a severe anemia. Without therapy, ingestion of a zinc coin can be fatal.

If you suspect your dog, cat, or bird ingested a metal piece or coin, an x-ray should be done immediately. Call your veterinarian immediately for life-saving treatment advice.

Poison type: Metals

Alternate names: pennies, metallic nuts, coin, bolts, staples, galvanized metal, zippers, toys, zinc oxide, Desitin, diaper rash, diaper rash cream, penny