

# Toxic essential oils

A guide for pet owners from Nationwide® pet insurance

## ‘Natural’ doesn’t always mean ‘safe’

Essential oils can pose a toxic hazard to pets.

Although essential oils are derived from natural sources, they’re not always safe for dogs and cats. They’re also growing in popularity, so it’s a good idea to know what to look for.

### What are essential oils?

Essential oils are natural chemical compounds extracted from plants. “Essential” in this case doesn’t mean “necessary,” it simply refers to the “essence” of the plant used for flavoring or scent.

### How are essential oils used?

Essential oils are sold in concentrated form and can also be found as an ingredient in products. Common uses or products containing these oils include:

- Aromatherapies
- Herbal remedies
- Cleaning products
- Pest repellants
- Liquid potpourris
- Personal care products

### What risks do essential oils pose to pets?

Inhalation of essential oils can cause respiratory distress. If absorbed through the skin or ingested, there is a risk of toxicity to the pet.

- Never apply concentrated, undiluted or 100% essential oils directly on pets. The higher the concentration, the greater the risk of harm.

- Cats are more sensitive to essential oils because of their unique liver metabolism. And since they groom themselves by licking, the risk of ingestion increases if products are applied to their skin or fur.
- Some products containing low concentrations of essential oils, such as those labeled specifically for pets, may be used safely. Follow all labeled directions and ask your veterinarian if you have questions about safety.

### Harmful effects from inhalation

The main hazard to cats and dogs from in-home oil diffusers is respiratory irritation. Inhalation of strong odors or fragrances can cause:

- Watery nose or eyes
- Nausea, drooling or vomiting
- Difficulty breathing
- Coughing or wheezing



## What if my pet inhaled essential oils?

Dogs and cats displaying any symptoms of respiratory distress should be moved immediately into fresh air. If symptoms don't resolve quickly, seek emergency treatment. Pets with pre-existing respiratory conditions—such as cats with feline asthma—are at greater risk.

- It's never normal for a cat to pant, display open-mouthed breathing or cough. Coughing cats look like they are trying to vomit a hairball, but nothing comes up. If your cat is exhibiting any of these behaviors, seek emergency treatment.

## Essential oils harmful to pets

Never use these highly concentrated essential oils on your pet.

### Cats

- Cinnamon oil
- Citrus oil (limonene)
- Clove oil
- Eucalyptus oil
- Pennyroyal oil
- Peppermint oil
- Pine oils
- Sweet birch oil
- Tea tree oil (melaleuca)
- Wintergreen oil
- Ylang ylang oil

### Dogs

- Cinnamon oil
- Eucalyptus oil
- Pine oil
- Pennyroyal oil
- Sweet birch oil
- Tea tree oil (melaleuca)
- Wintergreen oil

## Common signs of essential oil poisoning

- Skin irritation
- Drooling
- Vomiting
- Tremors
- Wobbliness (ataxia)
- Respiratory distress
- Low blood pressure
- Stomach ulcers
- Low heart rate
- Low body temperature
- Neurological depression
- Seizures
- Liver damage
- Kidney damage



## Pet Poison Helpline

If you think your pet has been exposed to something harmful, please call your veterinarian or Pet Poison Helpline immediately.

**Pet Poison Helpline**  
**855-289-0358**

Available 24/7

Please be advised that a one-time, per-incident consultation fee applies.

### In an emergency

Assess the situation so you can communicate clearly with your veterinarian. Most importantly, don't administer at-home treatment without first seeking veterinary advice.

### Get help

If your pet is unconscious, convulsing or having difficulty breathing, go immediately to the nearest emergency veterinary hospital. While they are stabilizing your pet, call Pet Poison Helpline at 855-289-0358 for treatment recommendations.

## We're here to help

Nationwide<sup>®</sup> offers pet insurance coverage for accidents, illnesses and preventive care

This educational pamphlet is provided by Nationwide in coordination with Pet Poison Helpline, an animal poison control center based out of Minneapolis, Minn. Driven by our shared passion for pets, our common goal is to provide pet lovers with valuable information on pet health and safety.

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