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and twitching. Untreated, this will progress to convulsions, diarrhoea and vomiting, difficulty breathing, a very fast heart rate, coma and death.

If we can see the pet within an hour of ingesting the poison we can make them vomit and thereby hopefully remove a significant amount of the poison from their gastrointestinal tract before it can be absorbed.

Further treatment involves controlling convulsions by inducing anaesthesia and removing as much poison from the gastrointestinal tract as possible by stomach flushing and enemas. There are specific antidotes for only some of the poisons.

In summary, if your pet is showing signs like tremors and twitching, you should seek immediate veterinary care for your pet, even if you personally have not had snail baits out. Vomit that is stained blue or green is also a strong sign that your pet has ingested snail bait. If you have been using snail bait and you suspect your dog or cat has swallowed some, make sure you take the packet with you to your vet so that they can institute the most appropriate treatment.

The sooner we can start treatment, the better the chances of your pet making a full recovery. Bottom line for me, is do not keep or use these products if you have a dog or cat. The risk is just too great.

Rat bait poisoning is a bit more insidious in how it works, in that several days will pass between ingestion of the poison and the onset of signs caused by the poisons. If you know that your pet has ingested rat bait you should seek veterinary attention straight way. If you are not sure if your pet has eaten rat bait you should still seek veterinary attention.

Fortunately there are readily available and effective antidotes for most types of rat bait. Chances of survival are greatest if the antidote is given before the onset of signs. If we cannot be sure whether or not a pet has eaten rat bait but there is a possibility, we will recommend treatment with the antidote, as this is safe and potentially life saving.

Remember to keep all these poisons well out of harms way if you own a pet. Sometimes curiosity gets the better of our canine and feline friends. In the case of these poisons the consequences can be devastating.

To us pet lovers, it seems inconceivable that anybody would ever want to deliberately harm a pet dog or cat. Sadly, as veterinarians we are occasionally confronted with the reality that there are people in society that don't like animals and feel the need to harm them.

There has just recently been a spate of poisoning of pet dogs in Melbourne involving the use of snail bait. As I was contemplating writing this column at work this evening, a council ranger presented me with several pigeons that had clearly been poisoned, were convulsing, and had to be humanely euthanised. They were found near our local shopping centre in a small park. There were many more at the park that had died from poisoning. It appears that snail bait has been used to kill the pigeons.

Very sad, but also a timely reminder of how potentially dangerous snail baits are for pet dogs and cats. We often see cases of snail bait poisoning after a period of wet weather. I have seen some brands of snail bait marketed as "pet friendly" because they have had a bitter substance added to them to reduce their palatability to dogs and cats. I have seen cases of poisoning where the snail bait was supposedly "pet friendly".

These baits are very dangerous to pet dogs and cats. I have also seen cases where the product was stored in a cupboard and the dog has managed to sniff them out, tear open the box and eat the pellets.

So what are these products and what do they do? The ingredients in the 2 most commonly used ones that we come across are metaldehyde ("Defender" – the green ones) and methiocarb ("Baysol" – the blue ones). They are flavoured to make them attractive to snails and slugs, hence their attraction for dogs and cats.

Signs of poisoning will occur within a short time of ingestion of the bait. The first signs are muscle tremors

