

# Tips for keeping your pets healthy & safe



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## Did you know 66% of all U.S. households have pets?

From grooming supplies to toys, and from flea treatments to cleaning products, many items we bring home can affect our pets' health.

Pet owners know taking care of their animals involves much more than just food and water. This year, Americans are projected to spend \$157 billion on their furry and feathered friends.

But some pet care products, such as common flea and tick treatments, contain potentially harmful active ingredients. One example is the insecticide fipronil, which is widespread in surface water and toxic to pets and people.

Some of the ingredients may be classified as pesticides that also contain the toxic "forever chemicals" known as PFAS. You might be surprised to find out that even regular household products can contain hazardous chemicals that pose risks to both animals and humans.



HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP KEEP EVERYONE IN YOUR FAMILY SAFE, INCLUDING PETS.

## GROOMING

Pet grooming products like shampoos and other cleansers can sometimes contain the same toxic chemicals flagged in certain cosmetics and other personal care products marketed to humans.

These chemicals can be hazardous to animals. They can also affect pet owners, too, if they bathe their furry friends or even just snuggle with them.

Read pet grooming product ingredient labels, and avoid products that include the terms "paraben," anything with "-eth," such as "sodium laureth sulfate," and the words "urea" or "fragrance."

Pet product manufacturers are not required to list ingredients on labels. So if there are no labeled ingredients, EWG recommends looking for an alternative that does list ingredients.

To find safer products for your pet – and for everyone in your home – look for products that are [EWG Verified](#)<sup>®</sup>, which means they meet our strictest standards for your health, with none of our chemicals of concern. It also means the products have been made with full transparency.

[Pet grooming products](#) are the newest addition to EWG's line of Verified products. Products that bear the mark never contain identified contact allergens or ingredients identified by the Association of American Feed Control Officials as poisonous to pets. See [EWG's list of unacceptable ingredients in pet care products](#).

## FOOD AND WATER

It's also important to limit your pet's exposure to harmful chemicals through [their food and water](#).

A 2022 [EWG analysis](#) found that some pet food packaging contained [PFAS](#), which don't break down easily and can build up in our bodies and the environment.

In February 2024, the Food and Drug Administration announced that, under market pressure, manufacturers have completed a "voluntary" phaseout of PFAS-based coatings in food packaging.

PFAS in general are difficult to avoid, since they contaminate so many common household products. To lower the exposure of everyone in your household, try to limit bringing home products known to contain PFAS, especially those marketed as stain-resistant or water-resistant.

Another EWG study found that pets may bear higher chemical body burdens than humans, because of their smaller size. Pets can also develop health problems similar to humans when exposed to certain chemicals.

One way to lower exposure is to use a faucet-mounted or pitcher filter to fill your pet's water bowl. You can search for your postal code in EWG's Tap Water Database to find information on contaminants in your area and consult our water filter guide to find the one that's right for you.

Your pet's plastic bowls can leach the harmful chemicals BPA and phthalates, in addition to PFAS, into their food and water. Stainless steel and ceramic alternatives are a safer bet.

## **TOYS AND OTHER ACCESSORIES**

Plastic toys carry many of the same harmful components as food and water bowls. Toys can release harmful volatile organic compounds or phthalates into the air when your pet's playing with them. Make sure to wash or replace toys after significant use.

Avoid clay-based kitty litter, which can present an inhalation hazard to both pets and people. It's also strip-mined and causes environmental damage during extraction. Instead, use kitty litter made of plant sources like wheat, walnut shell or paper pellets.

## CLEANING

Take stock of the cleaning products you use in your home, especially on floors. Pets spend a lot of time close to the ground, so whatever's on your floors can end up on their paws and in their bodies.

Look for cleaning products that bear the [EWG Verified](#) mark. Check out [EWG's Guide to Healthy Cleaning](#) for more information.

It's also good practice to vacuum often, with a HEPA-filter vacuum, if possible. And it's a helpful habit to take off your shoes at the door to minimize your pet's exposure to toxic chemicals in house dust.

Avoid stain-resistant treatments on couches, carpets and car upholstery – they're loaded with PFAS.

## OUTDOORS

If your pets spend time outside, avoid the use of pesticides on your lawn and around your home. They may damage the nervous system of pets that walk on the treated lawn, eat the grass or breathe in the chemicals.

If your home has a deck and you suspect it was made with arsenic-treated wood, it's best to keep your pets from playing or sleeping underneath it. The Environmental Protection Agency banned arsenic-treated wood for decks and playsets in 2004, but after three decades as the industry standard for outdoor lumber, it remains widespread. Seal it as often as possible, ideally every six months. Wash with mild soap and water, but don't powerwash, since this can remove the sealant's protective barrier.

## BOTTOM LINE

A few small changes – choosing safer grooming products, avoiding unnecessary chemicals and staying mindful about what your pets eat, drink and play with – can help protect every member of your household.

