

# Xylitol poisonings increase

**NATIONAL REPORT** — Although it has been used as a sweetener in foods since the 1960s, reported xylitol poisoning in dogs is on the rise, with more chewing-gum manufacturers using it in their products.

Dr. Steven Hansen, a veterinary toxicologist with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Poison Control Center, reports that from September 2002 to September 2003, there were no reported cases of xylitol poisoning, but in the past 12 months, there have been 150.

All of the instances are gum-related.

"It's not something you'd expect," Hansen says. "A few pieces of gum in a 40-pound dog, it's not what you'd expect at all."

But the consequences can be fatal.

Early symptoms include vomiting, lethargy, loss of coordination and possibly collapse and seizure. Within the first 30 minutes of ingesting the gum, the dog's blood sugar drops dramatically, Hansen says.

And there is the potential for liver involvement. If left untreated, the dog can go into liver failure within a day. But if owners and their veterinarians are aware and quick to act, it's not always fatal, he says.

"As long as there is no other organ involvement and they get past the first three days with no liver involvement, they should be fine," according to Hansen.

Pure xylitol is a white crystalline substance that looks and tastes like sugar. Xylitol contains 40 percent fewer calories than other carbohydrates. It is approved as a food additive in unlimited quantity for foods with special dietary purposes. **dvm**