

Nova Scotia

Unraveling the mini-mystery surrounding a trio of poisoned dogs in Amherst



'It's very rare to see three dogs just out for a walk in the same area coming in with severe symptoms'

[David Burke](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jan 10, 2020 6:00 AM AT | Last Updated: January 10



Three poisoned dogs in the space of six days were brought to Amherst Veterinary Hospital this month.
(Submitted by Carolyn Hollis)

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Three poisoned dogs in six days, all of them deathly ill, is something Amherst, N.S., veterinarian Carolyn Hollis hadn't seen in her 22 years of practice.

Two were suffering serious seizures, and the third had tremors throughout its body.

"It's very rare to see three dogs just out for a walk in the same area coming in with severe symptoms like that, definitely one for the records," said Hollis.

All of the dogs had been walked either this week or last week on the Amherst Golf Club course, a popular spot for dog owners in the fall and winter.

The unexplained illnesses set Hollis and some of the owners on the hunt to figure out what exactly had made the pets sick, and they have now come up with several theories.

"We started to worry that there was obviously something on the premises there that was causing them to be sick, there's no way of knowing what it could be," said Hollis.

The vet clinic couldn't determine what had made the dogs sick simply by testing them. What it could determine was that each animal had eaten something that was a neurotoxin, which was damaging their nervous system.

Severe seizures

The first of the pets was brought into the Amherst Veterinary Hospital last week. It was having such severe seizures it had to be put into a drug-induced coma for almost 48 hours and hooked up to intravenous fluids to flush out the toxin.

The dog spent five days in hospital and has recovered enough to go home. The second dog brought in was still at the hospital getting treatment as of Wednesday.

The third dog, which had tremors, fared the best. Vet staff were able to induce vomiting and get most of the toxin out. After some other treatments, it made a full recovery and was able to go home after one day.

But the mystery of what caused the sickness still lingered.

That worried Hollis, so she sent out a Facebook message warning people there was something in or around the golf course that could be making dogs sick. She also advised people not walk their dogs there.

There was a break in the case when two of the dog owners retraced the routes they had taken with their pets. One found decaying mushrooms their dog may have eaten, the other found a lunch container with rotten food their dog may have gotten into.

'Very toxic'

Either of those it could have poisoned them, according to Hollis.

"Rotten food produces mould and mould has a lot of chemicals that can cause severe neurotoxicity in dogs, compost is very toxic to dogs as well," she said.

The dogs' symptoms were similar to what others go through when they eat decaying food.

Hollis said there's no way to prove conclusively it was the mushrooms or rotten food, but said that seems to be the most likely answer.

"They don't have discriminating taste, and dogs in general they eat things that they shouldn't, unfortunately, and they don't have a real sense of what's good for them and what's bad for them," said Hollis.

"We see dogs eating all kinds of foreign objects and also rotten food and carcasses out in the woods."

She said dog owners should try and keep their pets on leash in any areas they aren't familiar with, so they can prevent them from eating something they shouldn't.

People should also make sure they dispose of their food properly and not leave their leftovers in the woods to rot, said Hollis.

"Just have some respect for our environment and for our co-inhabitants on this earth and use garbage disposals or take it back home with you," said Hollis.

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