



Alabama Veterinary Medical Association

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Protecting People, Pets and Livestock - Yesterday, Today and Always.

PRESS RELEASE

Pet Dental Health Month, Does Your Pet Have Bad Breath?

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Montgomery, Ala. - The Alabama Veterinary Medical Association wants to remind pet owners that healthy teeth are just as important for your pet as for you. If your pet has bad breath, it could be a sign of a much more serious condition. Preventive veterinary dental care can save your pet from suffering and save you money in the long run. Pet Dental Health Month, sponsored by the American Veterinary Medical Association every February, reminds pet owners that brushing their pet's teeth is good for both your pet's health and your budget.

"Some form of periodontal disease is present in most of the patients we see," says ALVMA President Dr. Hal Pate. "Bad breath is frequently a sign of infection caused by gum disease, which is very painful. The disease can be life threatening if left untreated, spreading the bacteria to vital organs including the heart and kidneys. If your pet has bad breath or discolored teeth you should visit your veterinarian. Prevention and early treatment are always best for you and your pet."

Most dental disease occurs below the gum line, where it's hard to see. Unfortunately, this means that most pet owners do not realize their pets have a problem until the disease has reached an advanced stage. The AVMA states oral disease is the most frequently diagnosed health problem for pets. The American Veterinary Dental Society reports 80% of dogs and 70% of cats suffer from some form of oral disease by age 3. According to Nationwide, the nation's first and largest provider of pet health insurance, periodontal disease accounted for the most dental pet insurance claims received by Nationwide last year— more than 29,000. Tooth infections accounted for the second most common dental-related claim, totaling more than 21,100.

While regular dental checkups are essential to help maintain your pet's dental health, there are a number of signs that dental disease has already started. If you notice any of the symptoms below, take your pet into your veterinarian immediately:

- Red swollen gums and brownish teeth.
- Loose teeth or teeth covered in tarter.
- Bad breath. Most pets have breath that is less than fresh, but if it becomes truly repugnant, similar to the smell of a rotten egg, it's a sign that periodontal disease has already started.
- Your pet shies away from you when you touch the mouth area.
- Drooling. Bleeding from the mouth.
- Frequent pawing or rubbing at the face and/or mouth.
- Reluctance to eat hard foods - for example, picking it up and then spitting it out.
- Loss of appetite or loss of weight (this combination can result from diseases of many organs, and early veterinary examination is important).

Preventive care is the best way to keep your pet healthy. With a little encouragement, you can teach your pet to accept having their teeth brushed. There are also many products that promote healthy dental care for pets including chews, treats and certain foods designed to reduce plaque. Be careful with the type of products you give your pet. Bones, antlers, hooves and some nylon products are too hard and can cause pets to break their teeth. Flexible chew toys are recommended. Some pet treats may also cause tooth problems. Many have bad ingredients like corn syrup which can cause decay. They are often high in fat, sugar and preservatives, and loaded with calories. Try offering healthy treats like carrots or green beans. The Veterinary Oral Health Council has a list of recommended products to aide with tarter and plaque listed on their website at <http://www.vohc.org>. Many veterinarians offer specials on dental cleaning fees during the month of February. Visit the ALVMA website at <http://www.alvma.com> for more information on Pet Dental Health Month and for additional resources and links.

Founded in 1907, The Alabama Veterinary Medical Association is comprised of approximately 700 veterinarians from around the state, all committed to protecting People, Pets and Livestock – Yesterday, Today and Always.

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More information is available at the links below:

<http://www.alvma.com/?page=PetDentalCare>

<http://www.avma.org/Events/pethealth/Pages/February-is-National-Pet-Dental-Health-Month.aspx>