

# FROM THE FOUNDATION



## Be Aware This Human Medication Could Kill Your Pet

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### Medications Prescribed to Us

Being pet owners, we all know the importance of keeping all medications, whether oral or topical, out of the reach of our pets. Whether the prescription is prescribed to us by our family physician to use personally or, as the owner of our pets, prescribed by our veterinarian for our pets, all drugs can be dangerous. Many pet owners, health care providers, dermatologists, and pharmacists, and even veterinarians, may be unaware of how deadly certain prescriptions can be.

As a patient with squamous cell carcinoma (cancer) my dermatologist has prescribed a scrip called Fluorouracil, also known as Carac, Efudex, 5-FU and Fluoroplex. This drug is prescribed to treat certain skin cancers in humans, including superficial basal and squamous cell carcinomas, as well as other skin conditions.

### How Fluorouracil is used

This drug is prescribed to treat certain skin cancers in humans, including superficial basal and squamous cell carcinomas, as well as skin conditions such as actinic or solar keratoses, vitiligo and warts.

Pets can be exposed to Fluorouracil not only by getting hold of a tube of the medication and puncturing the tube with their teeth but also by licking and ingesting even a tiny amount from your skin if the medication has recently been topically applied. It can be deadly to our dogs.

### Warnings of this Medication

The U.S. Food and Drug administration (FDA) has received reports September 2022 of 20 dogs that were exposed to Fluorouracil; sadly, all of them died. If you use this drug and if your pet ingests any amount of Fluorouracil, emergency veterinary care is essential; deaths can occur within as few as six to twelve hours after exposure, so minutes matter.

While the FDA hasn't received any reports of cats being poisoned by Fluorouracil, the Pet Poison Helpline explains, "The prognosis with 5-FU ingestion is grave in cats and guarded in dogs."

Due to the deadly nature of this drug to pets, the FDA has asked makers of topical Fluorouracil products to add new wording to the product labels that warn users about the danger to pets.

### Where Fluorouracil is Prescribed

It's also sometimes prescribed by veterinarians to treat types of skin cancers in dogs—squamous cell carcinomas and sarcoids which is a tumor most often seen in horses. Available in both solution and cream formats, if your pet accidentally ingests this drug, even in very small quantities, it's likely to be deadly.

### Visible Signs of Ingestion

Common signs and symptoms of Fluorouracil poisoning include vomiting, sometimes with blood, diarrhea (with or without blood), difficulty breathing, seizures, tremors/shaking, lethargy (decreased activity), incoordination and drooling.

According to the Pet Poison Helpline, while the intravenous form of Fluorouracil, a chemotherapy drug can be used in dogs safely, the topical version can be deadly in even tiny amounts. The medication is rapidly absorbed in the central nervous system with tremors and seizures also occurring along with bone marrow suppression.

### Keep Your Pet Safe from Fluorouracil

In addition to ensuring that the tube of medication is kept in a secure location out of reach of your pets, be sure that no residue is left on clothing, carpets, floors, or furniture that your pet could access. Be sure to wash your hands after applying this medication and do not allow your dog to lick any areas of your skin where the drug has been applied. To be safe, you may want to avoid any contact with your dog until the medication is thoroughly absorbed into your skin.

### References:

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