

Dr. Justine A. Lee, DVM, DACVECC

Justine has more than 18 years of experience in the veterinary industry and is a board-certified emergency critical care veterinarian specialist and toxicologist as well as the CEO and founder of Vetgirl. She is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

As an emergency critical care specialist, I often see dogs presenting to the veterinarian or emergency veterinarian for acute tremors. Tremors are brief, spontaneous muscle contractions that can occur all over the body. Often, the tremors may start in the head and progress down the body. In severe cases, tremors can progress to [seizures](#). Untreated, tremors can result in severe complications, including:

- [Hyperthermia](#) (due to the muscle activity)
- Secondary clotting abnormalities (called disseminated intravascular coagulation [DIC])
- [Hypoglycemia](#) (i.e., a low blood sugar)
- Death

While tremors are a muscle activity in origin, seizures are actually a brain activity, making them very serious.

Is my dog having tremors?

If you notice your dog trembling, you want to differentiate it from trembling or shivering. Both trembling and shivering may be due to causes like:

- Nervousness
- Anxiety
- Behavioral issues
- A metabolic problem (like kidney failure or liver problems)
- An endocrine problem (like an underactive thyroid gland, a diabetic crisis, etc.)
- Abnormal body temperature regulation
- Cancer

What can cause tremors in my dog?

Tremors often occur as a result of poisoning. There are several poisons throughout [the house, yard, or garage](#) that can be life threatening to dogs when ingested, and can result in severe tremors or even seizures.

Some common poisons that result in tremors include:

- Compost poisoning
- Tremorgenic mycotoxins (found in moldy food or garbage)
- Prescription antidepressants
- Prescription amphetamines (used for ADD/ADHD in humans)
- [Snail and slug bait](#) containing metaldehyde
- Certain types of mouse and [rat poison](#) containing bromethalin
- Chocolate

How do I protect my dog from tremors?

When in doubt, avoid the common causes of tremors due to poisoning by doing the following:

- Make sure your compost is fenced off and out of reach to dogs.
- Don't allow your dog to free roam around unsupervised—often he can get into someone else's compost pile or garbage.
- Secure your garbage in a pantry or closet and keep it out of reach.
- Keep all prescription medications out of reach.
- Hang up your purse, briefcase, or backpack—these often contain a lot of products poisonous to dogs such as coins, prescription medications, over-the-counter NSAIDs, xylitol gum, etc.
- Never put mouse or rat poison in your yard or house if you have pets; consider more humane, safer snap traps instead.
- Especially during the holidays, make sure to keep all candy out of reach! This is one of the top emergency calls or visits—thanks to chocolate!

When in doubt, when it comes to any poisoning, the sooner you recognize the problem, the sooner we can treat it. It'll be less dangerous to your dog and less expensive for you!

If you suspect that your dog may have been exposed to something poisonous, contact your veterinarian or emergency veterinarian immediately. When in doubt, call [ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center](#) at (888) 426-4435 for 24/7 life-saving care. They may be able to instruct you on how to induce vomiting and whether or

not there is a poisoning risk or not.

Thankfully, tremors are often preventable—just make sure to keep those poisons out of reach!

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.