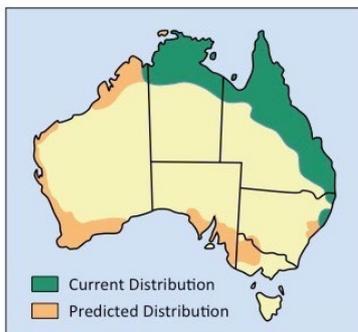




Cane Toads: How to recognise them, signs of cane toad toxicity in our pet dogs and cane toad toxicity first aid

By Nicky Wright

When wet weather arrives, it's the perfect environment for our amphibian friends, including the invasive and toxic Cane Toad; we thought it appropriate to shed some light on these pesky invasive amphibians.



History Of The Cane Toad

Rhinella marina, aka the cane toad, was introduced to northern Queensland in 1935. They have a devastating effect on the native predators and amphibians, and have no natural predators of their own (however some native species are learning how to safely eat them).

(image sourced from <https://ib.bioninja.com.au>)

How To Identify A Cane Toad

Most Queenslanders will have NO problem recognising one of these fellas. However the key identifying features are:

- Heavy Build
- "Warty" skin
- Bony ridge over eyes
- No webbing between toes on forelegs
- Leathery webbing between toes on hind-limbs
- Sit upright and move in short rapid hops
- Adults have a large **parotoid** gland behind each eardrum (tympanum); these glands are where the poison is secreted from

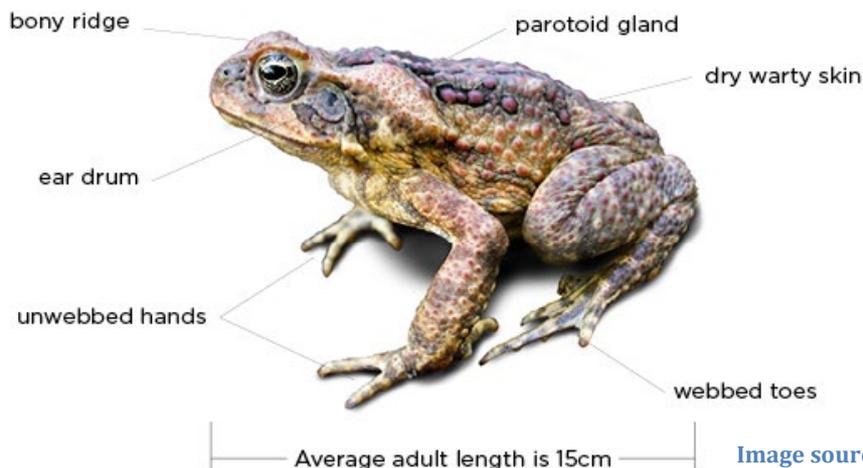


Image sourced from <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/>

Cane Toad Toxicity

Each life stage of the cane toad is toxic to our pet dogs: from their eggs right through to the adults.

The parotoid gland can be recognised as a large fatty wedge shaped mass behind the external eardrum. This secretes a thick and milky poison, which is produced when the animal feels threatened, or when pressure is applied directly to the gland.



image sourced from <http://ourherpclass.blogspot.com>

Toxicity results in severe cardiac toxicity and neurotoxicity; this is due to the catecholamines, vasoactive substances and bufotoxins. It affects the heart, the gastrointestinal tract and the nervous system.



Why Are Our Dogs So Susceptible To Cane Toad Toxicity?

The nature by which the cane toads move, and the predatory pattern of many dogs, makes Fido a prime suspect for cane toad interactions. Don't forget the Coppinger and Coppinger basal canine predatory motor sequence: **orient > eye > stalk > chase > grab-bite > kill-bite > dissect > consume**. The toxin most commonly comes into contact with the mucous membranes of the dogs mouth (gums), from the dog mouthing or licking the toad.

The toxin is a sticky/goopy substance that adheres to the mucous membranes, where it rapidly absorbs into the blood stream. **The toxin is also present in the tissue of deceased, and even dried cane toads.**

What Symptoms Should We Look Out For?

Other than the obvious diagnosis of witnessing your dog interact with a cane toad, the common signs of cane toxicity are not dissimilar to most signs of toxicity from other toxic substances:

- Excessive salivation and/or frothing from the mouth
- Red "injected" gums; it's useful to familiarise yourself with your dogs normal gum colour.
- Sticky or slimy gums: this is usually the toad secretion
- Irritated mouth. Your dog may start to "paw" at its mouth and gums
- Vomiting or retching
- Weakness; the dog may appear "drunk" or disorientated
- Muscles twitches, tremors or seizures
- Rigid limbs; occasionally the whole body will become rigid
- Increased body temperature (accurately assessed by a rectal thermometer)
- Increased heart rate
- Dilated pupils
- Collapse



Death is not uncommon. In an average sized dog death may occur within 15 minutes... therefore your next steps are critical!



First Aid For Cane Toad Toxicity

Your next actions could save your dogs life...

If you have witnessed, or even suspect that your dog has come into contact with a cane toad you should immediately begin the following steps:

1. WIPE YOUR DOG'S GUMS

Your goal is to remove the toad secretions from the dog's mouth; this will reduce the contact time the toxin has with the mucous membranes and will desist any further absorption of the toxin.

- Use a damp Chux type cloth and begin wiping the dog's *gums, palate and tongue*.
- Frequently rinse and wring out the cloth, if possible replace it frequently. **As part of your dog first aid kit I recommend having a packet of Chux (you can even cut them up)**; this means that in an emergency I can quickly soak several and they are ready to go.
- Continue wiping for **15 to 20 minutes**. Even if you think there couldn't possibly be any more secretions.

2. TAKE YOUR DOG TO THE CLOSEST VETERINARIAN

Always call the vet clinic you are planning to go to; this ensures they can have team prepped and primed to see your dog the minute you walk through the door.

Where possible, have one person wiping the dog's mouth (step one) whilst in transit to the vet. If this is not possible, and your dog appears stable and is not displaying any life threatening/severe symptoms, prioritise the wiping before travelling to the vet. **If your dog consumed the toad**, go immediately to the vet, they may be able to induce vomiting and provide toxin preventative and supportive therapy to the dog.

DO NOT "flush" the dog's mouth with a hose or by splashing water onto the gums
DO NOT encourage the dog to drink any water

Steps You Can Take To Prevent Cane Toad Toxicity

- ✓ Replenish outdoors drinking water sources each day (morning is best); including any pools you may have available for your dog/s
- ✓ Supervise your dog in the evenings. Where possible, bring them inside at night. When they are going outside for toileting, go with them: if your dog is known to chase or catch animals, put your dog on a lead for toilet breaks. This particularly applies when it is raining or it is humid.
- ✓ Teach your dog a reliable "Leave It" cue.
- ✓ Teach your dog a reliable recall – off distractions.
- ✓ Make your yard "Toad Proof"
 - Avoid having unnecessary light sources such as solar garden lamps, and turn off outside lights that may attract insects (yum yum).
 - Keep your yard neat and tidy, toads like quick escape routes such as long grass or dense low foliage.
 - Actively keep the toad population down in your area; the RSPCA guidelines suggest using "HopStop" – available from Bunnings Warehouse, and hypothermia – place the toad in the fridge for 12 hours, followed by 24 hours in the freezer. Deceased toads can be buried (away from access to your pet) or placed in the general rubbish bin.



The RDOC Foundations class teaches crate training, leave it and recall; each of these are life saving skills.