



Search News

 Search within News only.

[Top Stories](#)
[JAVMA News](#)
[Press Releases](#)
[Press Room](#)

 = AVMA/SAVMA
Members Only


Some files on this page require Adobe Acrobat Reader software. Click on the image above to download it for free from the Adobe site.

News

[News >](#)

Top stories

Menu Foods pet food recall

[\[Print version\]](#)

Content on this page has been provided by the The Animal Medical Center of New York City.

March 26, 2007

FAQ from The Animal Medical Center of New York City

FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE PET FOOD RECALL

[Distributed March 26, 2007 by THE ANIMAL MEDICAL CENTER of New York, www.amcny.org]

ACTION STEPS

Q: What steps should I take if I think my pet has eaten the recalled food or is not acting normally?

A: Check to see if you have any of the recalled foods. (Go to www.menufoods.com/recall, and click on Dog or Cat Product Information. If you see your brand listed, click on the name to see what kind of food made by that brand -- particularly its UPC code -- is being recalled.) If your pet may have eaten some of the recalled foods, take your pet to a veterinarian. The tests to determine if a pet is in renal failure are simple blood and urine tests -- they take 24 hours or less for results and have no side effects. Here are recommendations based on three possible scenarios:

1. If your pet has not eaten any of the recalled foods and is normal, you should not worry.
2. If your pet has eaten a recalled pet food, he or she should be seen by a veterinarian, whether or not the pet is sick. Some pets appear well but have abnormal tests. Because the drug found in the recalled pet food appears to affect the kidneys and causes low white blood cell counts in humans, blood tests should be done to check the blood cell count, in addition to blood tests to check kidney function. A urine test is also needed to monitor kidney function.
3. If your pet is sick and has eaten the recalled foods, your veterinarian will make a determination if hospitalization is required.

Q: My animals were on a steady diet of one of the recalled brands. I switched brands approximately six weeks ago. Are my pets still in danger?

A: The time course between eating the recalled food and developing renal failure is currently unknown. Some cases appear to have a rapid onset of kidney failure, while others seem to have kidney damage occurring slowly over time. You should have your pet tested if it consumed the recalled diets.

DEFINITION OF RENAL FAILURE AND SYMPTOMS

Q: What exactly is renal failure? Can my pet have renal failure and still be alive?

A: Renal failure means that the kidneys are not working to remove toxins from your pet's body. Your pet can be alive and be in renal failure. Most of the time, the symptoms of renal failure are decreased appetite, lethargy, vomiting, maybe diarrhea; increased water consumption, increased or decreased urine production. In cats that use a litter box, you may notice a need to change the box more often than usual. Dogs may ask to go outside more

often or the well housebroken dog may have accidents. It is important to note that animals can be in renal failure and NOT exhibit any of the above symptoms. Again, if you suspect that your pet ate some of the recalled foods, take him or her to a veterinarian.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Q: If my pet ate the recalled food and is not well, what are the treatment options?

A: Fluid therapy - flushing the kidneys with fluids to remove the toxins - is the mainstay of treatment, as it is for practically all kidney failure. Adequate hydration is important in preventing toxicity from the toxic agent, aminopterin, in people, and most of the dogs and cats treated have been very responsive to fluid treatment. Dialysis, in which the function of the kidneys is taken over mechanically, is recommended when the kidneys are seriously compromised.

THE POISONOUS INGREDIENT

Q: What do we know about the poisonous ingredient?

A: Currently, there is only speculation as to the cause of the renal failure. A rat poison (and a cancer-fighting agent for humans), aminopterin, has been found in containers of cat food. This may turn out to be the culprit, but further testing is needed. As a rat poison, it is not licensed for use in the United States.

Q: First there was talk that wheat gluten may have been the culprit. Should I avoid pet foods with wheat gluten?

A: Wheat gluten, a component of wheat flour, is a common ingredient in human and pet foods and is not inherently poisonous. In pet foods, it is used to thicken gravy. Because the foods affected by this recall are predominantly "cuts and gravy" types of foods, wheat gluten became a common agent to be studied. It is not wheat gluten itself that was the source of the problem. There are rare diseases where humans and animals are allergic to wheat gluten, but those diseases do not result in kidney failure.

DRY FOOD

Q: Is any dry food for cats or dogs known to be at risk?

A: The manufacturing process for dry food is very different than wet foods, so no dry foods have been recalled. We believe that a dry-food eating dog is safe even if the dry food is from the same company as a recalled wet food.

HOME-COOKED FOOD

Q: Since I now believe that pet food may be unsafe, what if I start cooking food for my pets at home?

A: The vast majority of commercially prepared pet foods have solid research and science behind their formulation and manufacture. In general they are the best food to feed your pet. Veterinarians rarely see cases of nutritional deficiency in pets fed commercial pet foods. Despite this current problem, commercially produced pet foods are still the best diet for your pet due to the safety regulations regarding diet composition and manufacturing process.

Home cooked diets may be lacking in essential nutrients since they have not undergone extensive nutritional evaluation. Over time, even the best cooks adjust their recipes, and even if you start with a complete and balanced recipe, the product evolves over time to become deficient in certain nutrients. Nutritionists call this "diet drift." However, if you do decide to thaw out and cook a package of hamburger for your pet, be sure it is adequately cooked, since undercooked ground meat has been implicated in human cases of renal failure.

As for raw food, a raw, frozen cat food was recalled for Salmonella contamination a few weeks ago. Scientific research has shown raw food diets to frequently be tainted with microorganisms known to cause disease in pets.

Q: Any suggestions about what "human" food to feed them on a regular basis? I would like to get rid of all commercial dog foods now.

A: Human foods do not have a perfect safety record either. Poorly cooked hamburger, spinach, scallions, turkey cold cuts, peanut butter and unpasteurized cheese have all been linked to illness and death in humans.

THE QUALITY OF PET FOOD

Q: Is there indication on a label if a pet food is premium or non-premium?

A: The most important feature of a pet food label is the words "complete and balanced". Those words indicate to the consumer that the food has undergone rigorous testing and

provides all the proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and micronutrients your pet needs. Unfortunately, reading the label would not have prevented the problem we currently have. Pet owners should know that, as long as their pets are eating "complete and balanced" pet foods, veterinarians rarely see cases of malnutrition.

Q: I believed that I was buying my pet a premium food. Are all of the brands being made from the same ingredients?

A: At first we were surprised that premium foods were affected, since we incorrectly assumed that premium food manufacturers had their own plants and manufactured all their own foods. This assumption was wrong. Now that we understand the manufacturing process better, it is simple to see how this problem occurred. The company provides a recipe to the plant and the plant "cooks" the food according to the company's specifications. This accounts for the difference in premium and non-premium food. But since all the affected foods seem to have come from 1 or 2 plants, the diets are likely all affected by an ingredient or piece of equipment common to the recipe or manufacturing process. In the recent contaminated spinach disease outbreak, this is exactly what happened. Multiple brands of spinach were affected because the spinach came from the same source and was simply packaged under different brand names.

REGULATING THE PET FOOD INDUSTRY

Q: Are there regulations on pet food, like there are for human food?

A: The American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) determines the nutritional adequacy of pet foods and if a pet food is determined nutritionally adequate, they are labeled "complete and balanced". The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates production of pet food through Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) regulations.

In cases of illness related to pet foods such as in the current situation, the FDA steps in to investigate the cause.

Ann Hohenhaus, DVM, DACVIM (Oncology, Internal Medicine) Chairman Department of Medicine

Cathy Langston, DVM, DACVIM (Internal Medicine)

For information, contact:

Wendy Gallart

Director, Marketing & Communications

The Animal Medical Center

212-329-8686

Wendy.Gallart@amcnyc.org

OR

Michael Shepley

212-786-9064

shepleypr@aol.com

[AVMA Home](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [About the AVMA](#)
[AVMA Journals](#) | [JAVMA News](#) | [Discussion Groups](#) | [Professional Issues](#)

American Veterinary Medical Association
[Copyright © 2007](#)