



Pet Food Safety!

A guide to keeping your family and pets safe when handling pet food

How should you handle your pet's food?

Commercial pet food in general has an excellent safety record. However, there are important safety considerations to keep in mind when handling pet food and treats. In particular, young children and those with weakened immune systems (patients with HIV/AIDS, those undergoing chemotherapy treatment, and organ transplant recipients) should use good hygiene when handling pet food, and choose an appropriate diet for the family pet.

Certain pet food diets can pose greater health risks to pets and their handlers. A raw meat diet may contain pathogens that can cause illness, like the bacteria *Salmonella*. Certain pet treats such as dried pig ears, cow hooves, and bones might not be heat-treated and could contain pathogenic bacteria. Sometimes these treats are sold in bulk bins, which further increases their potential for contamination. There have been several cases of human illness, and product recalls related to these products.



Non-damaged, canned pet food is very safe, because it is commercially sterile until opened. Dry pet food (kibble) is also very safe, although it is not sterile and should be handled properly. Low numbers of *Salmonella* may survive, but will not grow in dry pet food. If moistened kibble is allowed to sit out for an extended length of time bacterial growth can occur. One cannot rely on the health of a pet as an indicator of infection. For example, dogs and cats may not develop symptoms of salmonellosis, even when they carry and shed strains of *Salmonella* that can cause acute illness (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach pain) in humans.

Dry pet food contaminants are generally identified via routine sampling by the manufacturer or the Food and Drug Administration, and not as a result of disease outbreaks. Subsequent recalls are often precautionary measures taken by the pet food manufacturer. An up-to-date list of pet food recalls can be found on the FDA's website listed below.

What can you do to protect your pet and family?

Good judgment and sound hygiene practices are the keys to protecting you and your pets from foodborne disease.

Remember:

- If you have a weakened immune system, take precautions when handling pets and their food
- Avoid exposure to raw pet foods and treats
- Do not purchase pet food packages that are damaged or opened
- Store kibble in a cool, dry place in its original packaging within a sealed container
- Tightly seal opened canned food and store in the refrigerator
- Keep pet dishes out of reach of infants and young children
- Wash your pet's food and water dishes daily with hot water and soap
- Minimize the amount of time your pet's food sits out
- Do not moisten pet food if you expect it to sit out for any length of time
- Wash your hands with soap and water after handling pet food

For additional information:

- The FDA's list of animal and veterinary recalls and withdrawals: www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth/RecallsWithdrawals/default.htm.
- The FDA's "Tips for Preventing Foodborne Illness Associated with Pet Food and Pet Treats": www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/NewsEvents/CVMUpdates/ucm048030.htm.
- "Update on *Salmonella* spp contamination of pet food, treats, and nutritional products and safe feeding recommendations," June 1, 2011 issue of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.
- The CDC's "Healthy Pets Healthy People" website: www.cdc.gov/healthypets/index.htm.