

Food Safety News

Breaking news for everyone's consumption

Consumer-Funded Test Finds 11 of 12 Pet Foods Contaminated

By James Andrews | January 7, 2015

A number of pet food brands are contaminated with potentially harmful bacteria and other contaminants that could cause negative health effects to humans and their pets, according to a testing project funded by a group of pet owners and coordinated by the Association for Truth in Pet Food.

The project is the first of its kind to use crowdfunding to test pet products. The problems revealed by the project could make a big impact on general awareness of food as a source of illness in pets for both pet owners and veterinarians, one veterinarian told **Food Safety News**.

Pet owners were able to coordinate the fundraising using popular crowdfunding website IndieGoGo. Together, 240 people contributed a total of \$15,705 to test pet food brands for a range of harmful contaminants and other problems.

The tests found 11 out of 12 pet food varieties contained bacteria considered serious health threats by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) such as *Staphylococcus* and *Acinetobacter*, including drug-resistant varieties. They also found 3 out of 12 foods exceeded regulatory levels of nutritional content, and 4 out of 8 had medium or high levels of fungal toxins.



The pervasiveness of the bacterial contamination alarmed Susan Thixton, co-director of the Association for Truth in Pet Food and author of TruthAboutPetFood.com. Thixton and her colleagues organized the project, with laboratory testing coordinated by food scientist Tsengeg Purevjav, Ph.D.

Data produced by the project help explain the numerous human foodborne illness outbreaks linked to pet food in recent years, Thixton said. Clearly there's a disconnect between the test results and claims from pet food manufacturers that bacteria are eliminated during production processes, she said.

“They say that the processing of kibble foods or canned foods kills the bacteria, but we’re finding multi-drug resistant bacteria in a kibble and canned pet food,” Thixton said. “Veterinarians that looked at these results asked, ‘How can this happen?’”

Dr. Cathy Alinovi, a veterinarian in Indiana, reviewed the group's report prior to release and said the procedures adhered to good scientific standards.

Alinovi echoed Thixton, saying that the extensive bacterial contamination was the most alarming aspect of the report. She often sees dogs and cats with gastrointestinal problems and no explanation for their illness other than the food they're eating.

"My motto is that 80 percent of what walks into my clinic is fixed through food," Alinovi said. "These data really help veterinarians to say that there are common, everyday foods that have common ingredients that could be causing health problems."

The project tested a number of name-brand dog and cat foods, including Beneful dog kibble and Fancy Feast canned cat food.

There was only enough funding to test 8 out of the 12 foods for mycotoxins, which are toxins produced by molds and other fungi that have been shown to cause serious health effects in animals.

Two of the eight brands tested above levels considered "high risk" for mycotoxins: Meow Mix Tender Centers and Beneful Original dog kibbles. The Meow Mix product, in particular, was found to have more than three times the high-risk level for mycotoxins.

The tests showed nutritional content exceeding levels allowed by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) in three dog foods:

- Hill's Prescription Diet C/D Urinary Tract Health Canned Dog Food (exceeded maximums for calcium and phosphorous)
- FreshPet Vital Chicken, Beef, Salmon, Egg Recipe Grain Free Moist Dog Food (exceeded maximums for calcium and phosphorous)
- Cesar Top Sirloin Beef and Grilled Chicken Moist Dog Food (exceeded maximums for calcium)

Three cat foods were also found with levels of sulphur exceeding standards set by the National Research Council, but AAFCO does not set regulatory maximums on nutrients in cat food.

On a positive note, the tests returned no traces of melamine or euthanizing drugs in any of the 12 samples. Both substances have caused significant pet food scares in the past.

Thixton said that she hopes the report shines a light on the need for improvements to pet food manufacturing standards.

"It's called 'pet food,' but by regulatory standards it's considered animal feed," she said. "Most of these are feed-grade ingredients. Feed is often dumped on the ground, not brought into homes. It's a huge difference, and if they're calling it 'food,' it needs to be held to the standard of food."

Alinovi recommended pet owners bring the report to their veterinarian if they suspect food might be causing health problems in their pet.

"It's a great starting point for conversation with your veterinarian," she said.

The full report and other materials are available at the website for the Association for Truth in Pet Food.

Update (Jan. 8): Microbiologist and food safety blogger Phyllis Entis has published a critique of the testing project, questioning why the testing focused on bacteria of lesser concern and only tested to the genus level, which she says makes the results essentially useless from a food safety perspective. The ATPF has responded to the critique, including saying that they tested for more high-profile pathogens, but none were found.

© Food Safety News

[More Headlines from Nutrition & Public Health »](#)
