

Salmonella Risk in Pet Foods and Prevention

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Salmonella lurks in pet foods, supplements, and treats more often than you may think, making both pets and people sick.

Since 2010 the Food and Drug Administration has issued more than two dozen recalls warning consumers about salmonella-tainted pet products on the market.

We all have heard of *Salmonella* but what is it and where does it come from? *Salmonella* is a genus of rod-shaped, [Gram-negative](#), non-spore-forming, predominantly motile bacteria from the intestinal tract. *Salmonella* is closely related to *E. coli* and are found worldwide in cold- and warm-blooded animals (including humans), and in the environment. They cause illnesses like [typhoid fever](#), [paratyphoid fever](#), and [foodborne illness](#). *Salmonella* infections are [zoonotic](#) and can be transferred between humans and non-human animals. Many infections are due to ingestion of contaminated food. Sources of infection include:

- Infected food, often gaining an unusual look or smell, then is introduced into the stream of commerce.
- Poor kitchen hygiene, especially problematic in institutional kitchens and restaurants because this can lead to a significant outbreak.
- Excretions from either sick or infected but apparently clinically healthy people and animals (especially endangered are caregivers and animals).
- Polluted surface water and standing water (such as in shower hoses or unused water dispensers).
- Unhygienically thawed fowl (the meltwater contains many bacteria);
- An association with reptiles (pet tortoises, snakes, iguanas, and frogs, but primarily aquatic turtles) is well described.

Salmonella bacteria can survive several weeks in a dry environment and several months in water; thus, they are frequently found in polluted water, contamination from the excrement of carrier animals being particularly important. Aquatic vertebrates, notably birds and reptiles, are important vectors of *Salmonella*. Poultry, cattle, and sheep frequently being agents of contamination, *Salmonella* can be found in food, especially in milk, meats and sometimes in eggs which have cracks.

High temperatures in the cooking process kill the *Salmonella* organisms, but the problem is not all consumable pet products are cooked. There are many steps in the production process after cooking where cross contamination with *Salmonella* and other bacteria could occur.

Sickened pets may experience diarrhea, lethargy, fever, and vomiting. People handling contaminated pet products may become ill, too. In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that between 2006 and 2008, nearly 80 people (about half of them children under the age of 2) became sick after coming in contact with dry dog and cat food.

The way to keep your family and pets healthy is easy to do by following these steps:

- Wash hands with warm soapy water before and after touching pet food items.
- Store pet food, treats, and nutritional products according to label instructions. This usually means keeping them in a cool, dry, dark place.
- Discourage children younger than 5 years of age from touching pet food, treats, or supplements. Young children are more at risk for illnesses because their immune systems are still developing.
- Purchase individually packaged pig ears rather than buying them from bulk bins.
- Use a scoop to dispense pet food into bowls.
- Wash water and food bowls regularly with hot, soapy water.

Perhaps your best line of defense is staying current on pet product recalls. You can do so by visiting the FDA website at www.fda.gov/animalveterinary/safetyhealth/recallswithdrawals.

Portions of this article excerpted from the Newshound section of Dog Fancy March 2012 Issue "Stave Off Salmonella" written by Maryann Mott and also from Wikipedia.