

FSA highlights importance of safe handling for raw pet food

Raw pet food is pet food that is made up of unprocessed or uncooked?meat,?offal?and raw bone. It may not always be obvious that products - including dried pet treats and chews -?contain?raw meat. The meat in raw pet food comes from animal by-products that were initially intended for human use but have since been reclassified for pet food only.

Even with the greatest care, the risk of cross-contamination is much higher with raw pet food compared to other pet food. This is because raw pet food may?contain bacteria that would normally be killed during cooking. This means there's a risk that harmful bacteria, including those resistant to antibiotics (known as antimicrobial resistance or AMR), could be spread through contact with the pet food or your pet. In some cases, pets could also pick up infection and pass them to their owners, sometimes without showing any symptoms themselves.

The FSA conducted a [survey](#) of 380 raw dog and cat food products bought from retail stores and online between March 2023 and February 2024, with laboratory testing carried out by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA). Where issues were identified, the FSA worked with local authorities to address them. The findings are being published to remind pet owners that following simple hygiene practices when storing, defrosting, handling and preparing these products can reduce the risk of illness to themselves and their families.

The survey found that:

- 35%?contained?harmful bacteria including Salmonella, Campylobacter and E. coli that can cause illness in people??
- 29% ?failed to?meet?UK legal safety standards

Young children, pregnant women, older?people?and those with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of serious illness?and should take extra care with handling,?storing?and preparing raw pet food.

Pet owners who have concerns about the risks to their pet should speak to their vet about appropriate feeding choices.?

There are strict rules in place for [pet food](#) regulation. The FSA is working with local authorities to remind feed businesses of their responsibilities in ensuring that pet food is safe and to reinforce guidance around the safe handling of raw pet food for pet owners.

"We know that many pet owners choose raw pet food. This survey shows that these products can pose risks to human and animal health.

Good hygiene practices and safe handling can help reduce the risks to you and your family. Follow the same hygiene principles you would when preparing food for?the? humans?in your life; washing hands thoroughly with soap and water, cleaning all

surfaces, and storing and defrosting?pet food?and treats away from human food.

Detailed information?on the safe handling of raw pet food?can be found on the FSA's dedicated?[raw pet food guidance page](#)."

?Rick Mumford, Interim Chief Scientific Advisor for the FSA

"Raw pet food products can carry harmful bacteria such as *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*, which can cause diarrhoea, stomach cramps and sometimes vomiting and fever. These bacteria can be passed to people through handling raw pet food, contaminated products or surfaces or contact with pets who have eaten the food. Young children, pregnant women, older?people?and those with weakened immune systems are at greater risk of becoming severely unwell.

To reduce the risk of illness, pet owners should wash their hands thoroughly after handling raw pet food, clean and disinfect bowls, utensils and surfaces, store raw pet food separately from food for people and ensure good hygienic practices for handling of pet faeces. Anyone who is concerned about symptoms should contact a healthcare professional for further advice."

Gauri Godbole, Deputy Director, Gastrointestinal Infections, Food Safety and One Health at UKHSA

"APHA is a world leader on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in animals, carrying out vital research to reduce the spread of AMR.

Today's report is a reminder that raw pet food can carry harmful bacteria that pose a risk to animal health. Pet owners should handle raw pet food in the same way as they would raw meat to avoid food borne infections and increased risk of antimicrobial resistance spreading between pets."

Stephen Wyllie, Veterinary Head of One Health at the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)

The FSA is committed to ensuring food and feed safety in the?UK and will continue to work across government and with manufacturers,?retailers?and animal health professionals to?ensure the effective regulation of raw pet food.