

Scientists Confirm the Harm in Feeding Raw Pet Foods

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Incorporating raw meat into the diet of companion animals has been widely debated. Proponents argue that raw foods provide nutritional value that can't be achieved through kibble, promote healthier digestion, and reduce periodontal disease. Critics, including the [US Food and Drug Administration](#), deny such benefits and warn that raw pet foods expose animals to bacterial infections. In recent weeks there have also been a number of [recalls related to raw pet food](#) products.

Hoping to provide evidence one way or the other, a team of scientists from Utrecht University in the Netherlands tested for the presence of zoonotic bacterial and parasitic pathogens in raw meat-based pet foods. The results, published in [Veterinary Record](#), revealed that *Escherichia coli*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Salmonella* were all present.

What's more, people are at risk when they handle raw pet food or are licked by an animal that has consumed the food.

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Methodology

The investigators analyzed samples from 35 raw meat diet products across 8 brands available in the Netherlands. After thawing the meat, the researchers looked for the presence of *Salmonella*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *E coli*, and antibiotic-resistant *E coli* as well as two types of parasites, *Sarcocystis* and *Toxoplasma gondii*.

Analysis

E coli serotype O157:H7 was found in 23% (8/35) of the products, and the antibiotic-resistant beta-lactamase-producing *E coli* was found in 80% (28/35). *L monocytogenes* was present in 54% (19/35), other *Listeria* species in 43% (15/35), and *Salmonella* species in 20% (7/35).

Concerning parasites, 11% (4/35) of the products contained *Sarcocystis cruzi* and another 11% *Sarcocystis tenella*. Six percent (2/35) of products contained *T gondii*.

Conclusion

According to the investigators, “The results of the study demonstrate the presence of potential zoonotic pathogens in frozen raw meat-based diets that may be a possible source of bacterial infections in pet animals and, if transmitted, pose a risk for human beings. If non-frozen meat is fed, parasitic infections are also possible.”

They added that pet owners should be made aware of the risks associated with feeding their pets raw meat.