



Contact: Kurman Communications, Inc.
Cindy Kurman or Elisa Rascia
312-651-9000
team@kurman.com

It's National Pet Month! Give your furry family members the gift of good health by learning how to keep them safe from foodborne illness

Just like their human owners, pets are prone to contracting harmful [pathogens](#). "Unfortunately, foodborne illness often goes undiagnosed in pets because owners do not realize pets can contract them and veterinarians do not test for *Salmonella* or *E. coli*," according to Deirdre Schlunegger, CEO of [Stop Foodborne Illness](#), a national, nonprofit, public health organization dedicated to preventing illness and death from foodborne pathogens.



Based on 2012 data from the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), there are approximately 70 million dogs and 74 million cats in U.S. homes. Because pets are very rarely tested for foodborne pathogens it's impossible to know how many are sick from an outbreak, even when the outbreak involves a pet food product. If we apply the CDC's 1 in 6 (estimated people becoming ill from foodborne illness each year) to this population, it is estimated that 11,600,000 dogs and 12,300,000 cats per year become sick from a food related illness.

In honor of National Pet Month, Stop Foodborne Illness offers this advice to help pet owners learn how to minimize risk to both themselves and their pets.

Know which pets pose a higher risk

While some people consider amphibians and reptiles the perfect, low maintenance pet, they are highly susceptible to [carry Salmonella](#). Children with their immature immune systems, and the older adults are more likely to develop severe illness. Parents are warned to keep frogs and turtles away from young children under the age of five. Turtle, frog, iguana, snake, gecko, horned toad, salamander and chameleon owners should be aware of [Salmonella symptoms](#) and how to safely handle their pets.

Prevent the spread of foodborne illness by washing your hands

Just as you wash your hands before handling your food, wash your hands for 20 seconds with water before and after touching your pet's food to avoid cross contamination. Humans can contract foodborne illness through contact with pets whose food is contaminated or through direct contact with the food itself. In 2012, 49 humans tested positive for *Salmonella* traced back to pet food from a Diamond Pet Foods plant in South Carolina.

Clean your pet's dishes

Dirty plates allow harmful bacteria to grow. Keep germs away by cleaning your pet's food and water dishes after each feeding. For owners who keep pet food in one large container, use a clean cup to scoop food out of bags or containers.

Throw away old or spoiled pet food

Would you eat food that is past its expiration date? Probably not. The same goes for pets; throw away old or spoiled pet food in a sealed plastic bag to prevent the potential spread of pathogens carrying foodborne illness.

Learn how to spot foodborne illness related symptoms

Symptoms of foodborne illness in pets include diarrhea, vomiting, lethargy, and dehydration. However, pets don't always present these symptoms. They can carry pathogens in their saliva or fur and shed it in their stool. This makes it possible for humans to become ill from their pet's foodborne illness. Children who still have developing immune systems, the elderly and people with therapy pets are especially at risk for this.

What to do if your pets' food brand has issued a recall

If your pets' food has been recalled, be sure to act quickly and discard all of it in a sealed plastic bag.

In addition, stay up to date with pet food recalls.

- Visit Dog Food Advisor's list of all reported [dog food recalls](#) since 2009 to make sure the brand you buy is safe.
- Visit the [AVMA website](#) for recalls and alerts announced by the U.S. FDA and/or manufacturers in the last 90 days or to report an adverse event.
- Sign up for [Stop's Food Recall E-Alerts](#) to receive updates on pathogen outbreaks in real time. Stop gathers information on product recalls and foodborne illness outbreaks from multiple sources in the US and Canada and sends email notifications to subscribers.

For information or to make a [donation](#) to Stop Foodborne Illness, visit <http://www.stopfoodborneillness.org/>, Follow Stop news at newsline360.com/stopfoodborneillness, like Stop on [Facebook](#) and follow Stop on [Twitter](#) or call 773-269-6555.

About Stop Foodborne Illness

Stop Foodborne Illness is a national, nonprofit, public health organization dedicated to preventing illness and death from foodborne pathogens by advocating for sound public policies, building public awareness and assisting those impacted by foodborne illness. For more food safety tips please visit <http://www.stopfoodborneillness.org/awareness/>. If you think you have been sickened from food, contact your local health professional.

For questions and personal assistance, please contact Stop Foodborne Illness' Community Coordinator, Stanley Rutledge, by [email](#) or call 773-269-6555 x7.

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