

FDA probes dog illnesses tied to jerky treats

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Since 2007, about 580 pets have died as a result of illnesses related to the products, experts say.

(HealthDay)—Meat or plant-based "jerky" pet treats have been tied to mysterious illnesses in thousands of dogs, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which is asking the public for help in getting to the bottom of the issue.

"This is one of the most elusive and mysterious outbreaks we've encountered," Bernadette Dunham, director of the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine, said in a statement on the agency's website. "Our beloved four-legged companions deserve our best effort, and we are giving it."

In some cases, pets have become severely ill after eating the treats, which are sold as jerky tenders or strips made of chicken, duck, sweet

potatoes or dried fruit. Since 2007, about 580 pets have died as a result of illnesses related to the products, the FDA said.

The agency said it remains unclear why these pets are getting sick. With the outbreak under investigation, the FDA is calling on [pet owners](#) to come forward if they have a pet that became sick after eating jerky treats.

Most of the treats involved in these incidents were made in China. The FDA said pet-food manufacturers are not required by law to reveal the country of origin for each ingredient in their products.

The agency said it has begun conducting DNA tests on jerky treats, as well as additional screenings for a variety of chemical and microbiological contaminants, including antibiotics, metals, pesticides and Salmonella.

After performing more than 1,200 tests, visiting manufacturers in China, and consulting with researchers and officials here and abroad, the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine still does not know the exact cause of the illnesses among pets that have consumed jerky treats.

In order to gather more information, the agency is asking veterinarians and pet owners across the United States for information that it hopes will provide insight into the deaths and illnesses linked to these treats.

Veterinarians are being asked for blood and urine samples from pets that are affected. Pet owners are being asked to cover the costs of these tests as well as the shipping fees involved.

As the investigation continues, the FDA said it will alert consumers about the issue through a fact sheet distributed with a letter to veterinarians. The agency also advised pet owners to remember that

treats are not necessary and are not an essential part of a well-balanced diet. Pet owners are encouraged to report any illnesses that may be tied to jerky treats by calling the FDA Consumer Complaint Coordinator for their state.

The FDA advised pet owners to remain cautious about providing jerky treats to their pets and to be aware of potential symptoms of gastrointestinal or urinary problems, since about 60 percent of cases involved gastrointestinal conditions and about 30 percent involved kidney and urinary function.

To help pet owners recognize possible signs of trouble, the FDA provided information on symptoms that pets may develop within hours of eating jerky treats, including:

- Decreased appetite
- Vomiting
- Decreased activity
- Diarrhea (sometimes with blood or mucus)
- Increased water intake or urination

In more extreme cases, pets have experienced kidney failure, bleeding in the GI tract and a rare kidney disorder. In some cases, the animals experienced other symptoms, including collapse, convulsions or skin issues.

In January, a number of jerky pet treat products were removed from the market after a New York State lab found evidence of up to six drugs in certain jerky pet treats made in China. The FDA pointed out, however, that the levels of these drugs were very low and it's not likely they caused the illnesses.

Although the number of reported cases has declined since these products

were removed from store shelves, the FDA said that was probably because fewer jerky treats were available to consumers.

Pet owners who notice that their pet has become ill after eating jerky treats should stop offering these treats immediately. They also should consider taking the pet to the vet and saving the remaining jerky treats for possible testing, the FDA said.

The focus of the investigation into the cause of these illnesses may turn to the supply chain for certain ingredients in the treats, since the FDA has found that one firm used falsified receiving documents for glycerin, a jerky ingredient. Chinese authorities said they had seized products at the firm and halted its exports.

The FDA said it also plans to reach out to Chinese scientists at its veterinary research facility and U.S. [pet](#) food firms to increase scientific cooperation.

"Our fervent hope as animal lovers is that we will soon find the cause of and put a stop to these illnesses," Dunham said.

More information: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration provides more information on [illnesses related to jerky pet treats](#).

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