

Raw or Undercooked Animal-Source Protein in Cat and Dog Diets

(Amendments proposed by reference committee are in red.)

The AVMA discourages the feeding to cats and dogs of any animal-source protein that has not first been subjected to a process to eliminate pathogens because of the risk of illness to cats and dogs as well as humans. Cooking or pasteurization through the application of heat until the protein reaches an internal temperature adequate to destroy pathogenic organisms has been the traditional method used to eliminate pathogens in animal-source protein, although the AVMA recognizes that newer technologies and other methods such as irradiation are constantly being developed and implemented.

Animal-source proteins of concern include beef, pork, poultry, fish, and other meat from domesticated or wild animals as well as milk* and eggs. Several studies¹⁻⁶ reported in peer-reviewed scientific journals have demonstrated that raw or undercooked animal-source protein may be contaminated with a variety of pathogenic organisms, including *Salmonella* spp, *Campylobacter* spp, *Clostridium* spp, *Escherichia coli*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and enterotoxigenic *Staphylococcus aureus*. Cats and dogs may develop foodborne illness after being fed animal-source protein contaminated with these organisms if adequate steps are not taken to eliminate pathogens; secondary transmission of these pathogens to humans (eg, pet owners) has also been reported.^{1,4} Cats and dogs can develop subclinical infections with these organisms but still pose a risk to livestock, other nonhuman animals, and humans, especially children, older persons, and immunocompromised individuals.

To mitigate public health risks associated with feeding inadequately treated animal-source protein to cats and dogs, the AVMA recommends the following:

- **Avoid feeding** inadequately treated animal-source protein to cats and dogs
- Restrict cats' and dogs' access to carrion and animal carcasses (eg, while hunting)
- Provide fresh, clean, nutritionally balanced and complete commercially prepared or home-cooked food to cats and dogs, and dispose of uneaten food at least daily
- Practice personal hygiene (eg, handwashing) before and after feeding cats and dogs, providing treats, cleaning pet dishes, and disposing of uneaten food

The AVMA recognizes that some people prefer to feed raw or undercooked animal-source protein to their pets. The AVMA recommends that veterinarians inform pet owners of potential risks and educate them on how to best mitigate the risk of pathogen exposure in both handling the food and in managing pets consuming undercooked or raw animal-source protein diets.

* The recommendation not to feed unpasteurized milk to animals does not preclude the feeding of unpasteurized same-species milk to unweaned juvenile animals.