

September 23, 2019

As a retailer, you may have received questions or concerns from customers following reports of an investigation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) into any possible relationship between diet and dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM). The Pet Food Institute (PFI) provides answers to key questions regarding this investigation that will help you remain informed. PFI serves as the national voice for U.S. pet food and treat makers. Our members make 98% of all pet food in the United States. Learn more about us online at www.petfoodinstitute.org.

What is DCM?

DCM is a specific type of heart disease that in dogs results in an enlarged heart and can be serious if left untreated. Some dog breeds, such as the Doberman Pinscher, Great Dane, Golden Retriever, Boxer and Cocker Spaniel, are genetically prone to this disease. Symptoms of DCM include a decreased appetite, lethargy, coughing and collapse. Dogs displaying these signs should be taken to the veterinarian immediately. FDA's investigation is specifically focusing on DCM and not canine heart disease as a whole.

What role does a dog's diet play in DCM?

The exact cause of recent reported incidents of DCM has not yet been identified, but genetic predisposition is known to be a highly contributing factor to DCM in dogs in general. It is possible that multiple factors play a role, including individual pet physiology, pet food formulation, ingredients, and processing. One area that FDA is investigating is the possibility that ingredients and formulations in certain dog food recipes may play in development of DCM in some dogs. **FDA has neither recalled any pet food products nor recommended a change in diet for healthy dogs.**

What has FDA said about DCM and diet in the reporting from their investigation?

FDA's investigation is studying a recent observed increase of DCM in dogs not previously known to be genetically predisposed to the disease. The agency has suggested dietary factors that it believes require further examination and has repeatedly stated in public comments, including in June 2019, that "[a]t this stage of the investigation, the FDA cannot attest to whether or how these case reports are linked to diet" and "[a]t this time, we are not advising dietary changes based solely on the information we have gathered so far."

How many DCM cases were reported to FDA?

FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine has received 524 case reports of DCM between January 1, 2014 and April 30, 2019.¹ The agency's review of these submitted reports is ongoing.

¹ <https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/animal-health-literacy/questions-answers-fda-center-veterinary-medicines-investigation-possible-connection-between-diet-and>

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What do these DCM investigation updates from FDA tell us?

Even one case of DCM as a result of diet would be one too many, and pet food makers are committed to working towards understanding any potential relationship. Research indicates there are up to 89 million dogs in households in the United States. The approximately 500 submitted DCM reports (as of July 31, 2019) suggest that, if diet is a factor, there may be a combination of other elements involved beyond possibly diet, such as dog physiology and genetics.

I hear that this issue is related to grain-free dog food. What should I recommend to pet owners who are concerned about DCM?

The FDA is not recommending diet change for healthy dogs as a way to avoid DCM and has not determined a relationship between any specific type of diet or pet food ingredient and DCM. As a retailer, you know that grain-free dog food has become an important part of the marketplace, with research indicating that up to 44 percent of U.S. pet food formulations are grain-free.² This data indicates that, while the increase in reported DCM cases requires attention, millions of dogs are thriving on diets marketed as grain-free.

Are pet food makers going to stop selling grain-free products?

Members of the Pet Food Institute are committed to providing nutritionally balanced food for our dogs and cats, while providing choice for today's pet owners. Whether making grain-free or any other type of pet food, PFI members have agreed to our [Code of Practice](#), which reinforces a commitment to product safety and pet well-being. Grain-free pet food can be a safe option for pet owners and retailers seeking choice in the marketplace.

What have PFI and U.S. pet food makers done regarding DCM?

PFI established a group of nutritionists, veterinarians and product safety specialists from among our member companies in 2018, with the task of sharing information to better understand DCM and any relationship between diet and heart disease in dogs. This group continues to gather and share information focused on determining whether there is any link between certain diet factors (including ingredients, formulation and processing) and DCM in dogs who are not genetically predisposed to the disease.

Is research being done on this issue?

Significant industry and academic resources are being devoted to understanding DCM and its causes. As sound information becomes available, we will share it with key pet care stakeholders.

² <https://www.petfoodindustry.com/blogs/7-adventures-in-pet-food/post/7161-pet-food-ingredients-whats-hot-and-getting-hotter>