

September 18, 2020

*As a veterinarian, you may have received questions or concerns from clients following news on an investigation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) into any possible relationship between dog diet and dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM). The Pet Food Institute (PFI) provides answers to key questions to help as you educate and advise your clients on their dog's nutrition. PFI serves as the national voice for U.S. pet food and treat makers and its members make the vast majority of all pet food in the United States. Learn more about us online at [www.petfoodinstitute.org](http://www.petfoodinstitute.org).*

## **About DCM**

The Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine notes that “DCM is characterized by dilation of the ventricles with ventricular wall thinning. In many cases, dilation of all four chambers of the heart is seen. The ability of the heart to serve as a pump is diminished, and clinical signs of DCM occur secondary to either decreased delivery of oxygenated blood to the body (lethargy, weakness, weight loss, collapse), or to congestion of blood in the lungs (coughing, increased respiratory rate and/or effort, abdominal distention) or both.”<sup>1</sup> DCM is diagnosed through echocardiogram, and multiple dog breeds are recognized as genetically predisposed to the disease, such as the Doberman Pinscher, the Great Dane and the Irish Wolfhound.

## **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, relying on information provided by veterinarians, has suggested dietary factors that it believes require further examination. However, to date, **FDA has not established any causative relationship between diet and recent reported incidents of DCM.** The agency 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.<sup>2</sup> As of September 2020, the agency has not released any updated numbers.

## **What do these DCM investigation updates from FDA tell us?**

Even one case of DCM is one too many, and pet food makers are committed to working toward understanding DCM and any potential relationship to nutrition. Research indicates there are up to 89

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vet.cornell.edu/hospitals/companion-animal-hospital/cardiology/canine-dilated-cardiomyopathy-dcm>

<sup>2</sup> <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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million dogs in households in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The approximately 500 submitted DCM reports (as of September 2020) suggest that, if nutrition is a factor, there may be multiple elements involved, including overall diet, dog physiology, genetics and breeding.

### **Should my clients avoid grain-free diets?**

Veterinarians play a critical role in providing their clients with evidence-based recommendations on pet diet and nutrition. At this time, FDA has not recommended any dietary changes for healthy pets. The most recent FDA update states that the prevalence of reports in dogs eating a grain-free diet might correlate to the significant growth in popularity of grain-free food over the last several years.

### **What role can veterinarians play in understanding DCM and its causes?**

We fully support veterinarians in their role as primary medical caregivers to dogs and cats, especially as it relates to diagnosing and treating illness, and we support a collaborative effort to determine whether diet and nutrition play any role in the occurrence of DCM. We encourage veterinarians to share with FDA and pet food makers any information related to diagnoses of DCM in their clients' pets, including a complete diet history, full medical history, and echocardiogram results. This critical information helps to build the library of useful data that will facilitate a greater understanding of this disease and its causes.

### **What should veterinarians do if DCM is diagnosed?**

We encourage veterinary professionals to take two important steps when DCM is diagnosed in a patient that is not genetically predisposed to the condition.

- It is critical for veterinary professionals **to report well-documented cases of DCM in dogs not genetically predisposed to DCM**. This information may be submitted using the FDA's electronic Safety Reporting Portal at [www.safetyreporting.hhs.gov](http://www.safetyreporting.hhs.gov). Veterinary professionals are encouraged to provide as detailed information as possible regarding diet history, medical records and diagnostic testing. FDA reviews information submitted through this portal and will determine whether there is a need to conduct follow-up contact or to obtain diagnostic samples (e.g., tissue, blood, leftover food) for possible testing.
- Pet food makers also ask that veterinarians **contact them regarding any well-documented diagnoses of DCM the veterinarian believes may be related to diet or nutrition**. This exchange of information is important as we work together to better understand DCM and its causes. The pet food maker's contact information is clearly listed on the product label.

### **Has PFI taken a position with respect to FDA's investigation?**

We agree with FDA that the recent reported DCM cases in dogs and cats is a complex issue requiring scientific evaluation, including factors such as genetics, breeding, nutrition, overall diet and physiology. Both FDA's and pet food makers' understanding of DCM and any link to diet and nutrition relies heavily on the information that veterinarians gather and share.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/198100/dogs-in-the-united-states-since-2000/>

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

PFI members are individually and collectively examining the role of diet and nutrition in pet health, including DCM in particular. Member company nutritionists, veterinarians and product safety specialists are closely studying available new information and engaging with PFI to advance pet food makers' understanding of any potential connection between DCM and nutrition.

### **Is research being done on this issue?**

Significant research is underway that may answer many questions regarding what role, if any, nutrition may play in the occurrence of DCM. To date, available information suggests that the development of DCM in dogs not genetically predisposed to the disease is a complex issue with multiple confounding factors.