

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 98% of all pet food in the United States. Learn more about us online at 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.”¹ DCM is diagnosed through echocardiogram, and multiple dog breeds are genetically predisposed to the disease, such as the Doberman Pinscher, the Great Dane, the Golden Retriever, the Boxer and the Cocker Spaniel.

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, 2019.² The agency's review of these submitted reports is ongoing.

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 diet. Research indicates there are up to 89 million dogs in households in the United States.³ The approximately 500 submitted DCM reports (as of July 31,

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

² <https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/animal-health-literacy/questions-answers-fda-center-veterinary-medicines-investigation-possible-connection-between-diet-and>

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

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, before the disease manifests in the patients.

Should my clients avoid grain-free diets?

Veterinarians play a critical role in providing their clients with evidence-based recommendations on pet nutrition. At this time, FDA has not communicated that these cases can be explained simply by whether or not the pets' diets do not contain grains, and the agency 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 also might correlate to the significant growth of grain-free food over the last several years, and research indicates that up to 44% of U.S. pet food formulations are grain-free.⁴

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 testing the possibility of a nutritional component in the genesis of DCM. We encourage veterinarians to share with FDA and pet food makers any information on DCM, including a complete diet history, full medical history, and echocardiogram results. This critical information helps to help 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 whose illness is suspected of having a link to diet**. This information may be submitted using the FDA's electronic Safety Reporting Portal at www.safetyreporting.hhs.gov. Veterinary professionals are encouraged to provide as detailed information as possible regarding feeding history, medical records and diagnostic testing. FDA reviews information submitted through this portal and will follow up with veterinarians as needed, such as to obtain diagnostic samples. FDA 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 the manufacturers regarding any well-documented incidents**. This exchange of information is critical as we work together to determine the various components involved in DCM. A manufacturer's contact information is clearly listed on the pet food label.

⁴ <https://www.petfoodindustry.com/blogs/7-adventures-in-pet-food/post/7161-pet-food-ingredients-whats-hot-and-getting-hotter>

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

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

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 work to share it with all key stakeholders. These current efforts will benefit from veterinarians' input as we all work together to identify and reduce factors that could lead to DCM in dogs and cats.