

Acetaminophen Found in Dog Food

ASPCA says the low dose of acetaminophen found in some cat and dog food poses the greatest risk to cats.

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ExperTox of Texas, has reported finding low concentration levels of acetaminophen, a common pain reliever used in Tylenol, in multiple brands of dry and wet cat and dog food it tested at the request of individuals and manufacturers. The low concentration "can be a problem for pets," said Donna Coneley, a spokesperson for ExperTox.

The company declined naming the brands that tested positive.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is investigating this report and collecting samples to test for acetaminophen or other compounds, according to Vash Klein, a spokesperson for the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine.

The low dose of acetaminophen found in some dog and cat food poses the greatest risk to cats, says the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA).

"Early information on this contamination suggests that concentration levels are not high enough to have an adverse effect on most dogs," said Dr. Louise Murray, director of medicine at the ASPCA's Bergh Memorial Animal Hospital. "Cats are more at risk."

Cats' particular sensitivity stems from their low level of a specific enzyme that could metabolize the drug better, says Murray. They are generally more susceptible than other animals to red blood cell damage, too, she added.

"Our data show that if an average-sized cat ingests as little as one extra-strength acetaminophen pain-reliever caplet and is not treated in time, it can suffer fatal consequences," said Dr. Steven Hansen, a board-certified toxicologist and manager of the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center in Illinois.

Depending on the amount of acetaminophen ingested, animals might experience methemoglobinemia, which can restrict blood cells' ability to carry oxygen to organs or result in liver damage.

Symptoms of acetaminophen poisoning in dogs and cats might include depression, weakness and difficulty breathing, says Hansen. Cats and, in very rare occurrences, small dogs, might also show swelling of the face and paws.

"We also see a condition called 'cyanosis'," says Hansen, "which is literally when their gums and tongue start turning a muddy color due to the lack of oxygen."

Because of the little information regarding this current finding, cat and dog owners that remain alert to these symptoms will be more likely to save their pets' lives, the ASPCA vets said.

If your dog exhibits any of the above symptoms, take him to a veterinarian immediately.