

Dog Food Recall Continues, Death Toll Rises

FDA says cats appear to be more susceptible to illness in dog food recall than dogs.

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A total of 14 animal deaths – one dog and 13 cats – are now being attributed to the Menu Foods Inc. wet pet food recall issued March 16, according to the Food and Drug Administration.

Nine of those deaths were of cats that fell ill during a routine, quarterly taste test Menu Foods conducted with 25 cats and 15 dogs to test the products' palatability, the FDA said March 20.

The taste tests, which began Feb. 27, were unrelated to consumer complaints the company received, beginning Feb. 20, of pets becoming sick after eating the products, according to Stephen Sundlof, DVM, director of the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine.

A contaminated shipment of wheat gluten used to thicken the gravy in 95 wet-style foods made by the private-label Ontario, Canada, pet food manufacturer, is the suspected source of illness, the FDA noted.

The investigation however, is ongoing, the FDA said March 20, and other sources are not being ruled out. Because wheat gluten is not usually a problematic source, the FDA says it is looking at the possibility that a mold or chemical toxin contaminated the wheat gluten, which was used by both a Kansas and New Jersey plant of Menu.

So far, the affected foods, produced between Dec. 3, 2006 and March 6, 2007, have only come from the Kansas plant.

The FDA said the affliction seems to be affecting cats more than dogs and that animals usually show signs of contamination within a few days of consuming tainted food. The FDA also said it expects additional pet deaths as the investigation unfolds, but would not speculate on the number.

Among the symptoms of kidney failure in dogs and cats, according to Tim Hackett, head of emergency and critical care at Colorado State University's veterinary teaching hospital, are loss of appetite and nausea.

"Sometimes owners will notice their pet's going to the bathroom more frequently, or having accidents in the house," Hackett said. One thing that could play a factor, he said, is the pet's hydration, or lack thereof.

"A kidney's job is to concentrate the urine. If a pet's been exercising or a pet's been deprived of water, that can play a part."

Owners who think their dog may have eaten contaminated food are advised to consult a veterinarian immediately, Hackett said.

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