



Canadian Veterinary  
Medical Association

Association canadienne  
des médecins vétérinaires

# Raw Meat-Based Diets for Pets

July 3, 2018

## Position

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) accepts the evidence for potential health risks to pets fed raw meat-based diets (RMBDs), and to humans who are in contact with RMBDs, or with pets fed RMBDs. The CVMA holds that the documented scientific evidence of potential animal and public health risks in feeding RMBDs outweighs any perceived benefits of this feeding practice.

## Summary

- There are multiple peer-reviewed studies documenting risks to animals and in-contact humans resulting from pathogens, toxins and physical hazards in RMBDs fed to pets;
- Although recent data show that raw homemade diets may have some increased digestibility, this feature is not attributable specifically to the raw nature of the diet;
- The CVMA highly recommends that veterinarians counsel owners wishing to feed RMBDs on the potential risks to people and pets;
- The CVMA strongly recommends that veterinarians consult with a Board certified veterinary nutritionist before recommending a home prepared cooked diet that will be fed on a long-term ongoing basis.

## Background

1. RMBDs consist of uncooked ingredients that are derived from domesticated or wild-caught food animal species, and fed to dogs or cats living in home environments. These diets can be “home-prepared,” “commercially prepared” or “commercially available using HPP (high pressure pasteurization)” (1).
2. Commercially prepared RMBDs may be fresh, frozen, or freeze-dried and sold commercially for domestic cats and dogs. Some of these diets meet the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) Dog or Cat Food Nutrient Profiles; however, others do not have the AAFCO designation (2,3). Non-AAFCO-designated diets should not be fed as primary balanced diets. Commercial RMBDs are often manufactured in facilities or industrial kitchens, and then packaged into smaller volumes for purchase.
3. Given that the meat used for RMBDs is not designated for human consumption, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)

- does not require or uphold any specific meat inspection requirements or microbial testing during food manufacturing and storage. Pet food is only regulated by the CFIA if it is imported into Canada (4).
4. There is evidence that owners feeding RMBDs are more likely to rely on informal advice such as that gleaned from the Internet and less on that obtained from a veterinarian (5).
  5. There are multiple peer-reviewed studies documenting potential risks to both pets and humans who are in contact with pets from pathogens, inhibitory substances and/or physical hazards present in raw meat diets (6,7). The following situations have been reported to occur as a result of RMBD fed to pets (8-26).
    - a) tooth fracture, obstipation, constipation, perforation along gastrointestinal tract;
    - b) exposure to inhibitory substances ingredients such as founds in raw fish (containing thiaminase which metabolizes thiamine and can lead to thiamine deficiency), and in raw eggs containing avidin which binds to biotine and cause biotine deficiency, etc.
    - c) shedding bacterial pathogens in stool (may also be transmitted by licking), possibly leading to significant zoonotic infections to humans. Pathogens of concern include but are not limited to: Escherichia coli, Salmonella, and Campylobacter, Brucella.
    - d) increased risk of human infection in hospital or nursing home patients who participate in pet visitation;
    - e) increased risk of infection in immune-compromised members of a household;
    - f) increased risk of infection in very young children from exposure to RMBD food, food bowls, and feces of pets consuming raw food diets;
    - g) increased risk of infection for old, young puppies/kittens, and pets receiving immunosuppressive drugs;
    - h) increased risk of infection for hospitalized pets when housed in the same kennel or close vicinity of other pets;
    - i) bacterial pathogens in raw foods and in the stool of pets fed raw foods have increased patterns of antimicrobial resistance;
    - j) significant health risks to growing puppies and adult dogs from potential nutritional deficiencies.
  6. Although recent data show raw homemade diets may have some increased digestibility, this feature is not specific to the raw nature of the diet. It appears to vary greatly depending on the raw diet and how it is processed (ground being more digestible than whole prey, for example) (27). The digestibility of RMBDs is similar to cooked diets. In the latter case, microbial contamination would be reduced or eliminated (28).
  7. The CVMA highly recommends that veterinarians counsel owners wishing to feed RMBDs on the risks to themselves and their pets as a result of feeding RMBDs. This conversation should be documented in the medical record.
  8. The CVMA strongly recommends, in the case of home-prepared cooked diets which have been recommended by the veterinarian, that the veterinarian and owner consult with a board-certified veterinary nutritionist to determine if the owner is using a safe and nutritionally balanced recipe. The CVMA advises that veterinarians who choose to recommend or sell RMBDs for pets under their care are aware of potential liability should a pet or human become ill due to pathogens originating from RMBDs.
  9. The CVMA advises veterinarians who recommend RMBDs to inform pet owners of associated risks and to educate owners on how to mitigate the potential risk of pathogen exposure from handling such products and/or in managing pets consuming the diets.
  10. The CVMA encourages pet owners who elect to not feed their animals commercially prepared diets (raw or cooked) to seek advice from a board-certified veterinary nutritionist regarding the preparation of nutrition-balanced, home-cooked diets. Information authored by such nutritional experts is widely available on-line.
  11. The CVMA encourages federal authorities to implement an inspection system designed to mitigate risks from diseases transmissible to humans through raw meat-based diets for pets in the interest of public health.

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