

November 5, 2020

As a retailer, you may have received questions or concerns from customers following reports of an investigation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) into any possible relationship between diet and dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM). The Pet Food Institute (PFI) provides answers to key questions regarding this investigation that will help you remain informed. PFI serves as the national voice for U.S. pet food and treat makers. Our members make the vast majority of all pet food in the United States. Learn more about us online at www.petfoodinstitute.org.

What is DCM?

DCM is a specific type of heart disease that in dogs results in an enlarged heart and can be serious if left untreated. Some dog breeds, such as the Doberman Pinscher, the Great Dane and the Irish Wolfhound, are recognized as genetically prone to this disease. Symptoms of DCM include a decreased appetite, lethargy, coughing and collapse. Dogs displaying these signs should be taken to the veterinarian immediately. FDA's investigation is specifically focusing on DCM and not canine heart disease as a whole.

What role does a dog's diet play in DCM?

The exact cause of reported incidents of DCM has not yet been identified, but genetic predisposition is known to be a highly contributing factor to DCM in dogs in general. FDA has acknowledged that multiple factors may play a role in the occurrence of DCM, including: overall diet, pet food formulation, ingredients, processing, genetics and breeding, and individual pet physiology. It is important to note that the FDA has not determined if there is a dietary link to the development of DCM and does not recommend any dietary changes based solely on the information gathered so far. **FDA has neither recalled any pet food products nor recommended a change in diet for healthy dogs.**

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 has suggested dietary factors that it believes require further examination and 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." And again, on November 3, 2020, the agency [noted that](#) "FDA has no definitive information indicating that the diets are inherently unsafe and need to be removed from the market, but we are continuing to work with stakeholders in assessing how the diets may interact with other factors that may be impacting non-hereditary DCM."

How many DCM cases were reported to FDA?

FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine has received approximately 1,100 case reports of DCM between January 1, 2014 and September 29, 2020¹.

What do these DCM investigation updates from FDA tell us?

FDA stated on September 29 that "what we at CVM have learned since these cases first started coming to our attention is that DCM is a scientifically complex, multifaceted issued." Even one case of DCM as a result of diet or nutrition would be one too many, and pet food makers have remained committed to working toward understanding any potential relationship nutrition. Research indicates there are up to 89 million dogs in households in the United States. The current number of submitted reports of DCM in dogs (as of September 2020) suggests that, if diet is a factor, there may be multiple elements involved, including dog physiology, underlying conditions, genetics and breeding.

I hear that this issue is related to grain-free dog food. What should I recommend to pet owners who are concerned about DCM?

The FDA is not recommending diet change for healthy dogs as a way to avoid DCM and has not determined a relationship between any specific type of diet or pet food ingredient and DCM. As a retailer, you know that grain-free dog food occupies a large segment of the marketplace. This information indicates that, while the increase in reported DCM cases requires attention, millions of dogs are thriving on diets that include foods marketed as grain-free.

Are pet food makers going to stop selling grain-free products?

Members of the Pet Food Institute are committed to providing nutritionally balanced food for our dogs and cats while maintaining choice for today's pet owners. Whether making grain-free or any other type of pet food, PFI members have agreed to abide by our [Code of Practice](#), which reinforces a commitment to product safety and pet well-being. Grain-free pet food can be a safe option for pet owners and retailers seeking choice in the marketplace.

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

PFI members individually and collectively have been examining the role of diet and nutrition in pet health, including DCM in particular. Significant research is underway; and 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. We are committed to learning more about this medical issue and will continue to collaborate with the FDA, veterinarians, stakeholders and pet owners.

¹ <https://www.ksvdl.org/resources/documents/dcm-forum/DCM-Forum-SolomonOpening-Remarks.pdf>