



Animal Health Diagnostic Center

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AHDC FACT SHEET

Pet Food Testing for Possible Contamination Information for Pet Owners

The first step that should be taken whenever a commercial pet food product is suspect in causing an adverse reaction of any kind is to contact the pet food manufacturer. The contact information for the manufacturer can usually be found on the label, and it is also important to find lot numbers and sell-by dates on the label. In addition, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) can be contacted at

<http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth/ReportaProblem/ucm182403.htm> to file a complaint. It is important to provide exact information about the food (variety, lot number, sell-by date, etc) and the animal illness. Please know that reports from veterinarians and pet owners of adverse reactions to pet foods are important to the FDA's pet food monitoring program. Furthermore, responsible pet food manufacturers take any suspected problems with their products very seriously and retain samples from every lot in case future testing is needed.

Your veterinarian should assist in this effort, since clinical information from the veterinarian is important in any investigation. Please have copies of medical records, testing, or treatments available to include in the reports. Delays in reporting could allow a problem to remain undetected, with other animals affected.

The recommendation is always to begin with a thorough clinical investigation that includes a physical exam, blood work, and, in the event of the pet's death, a post-mortem examination. A post-mortem examination, also called a necropsy (or an autopsy when done on a human after death) is a complete inspection of the body visually and by palpation/touch. Tissue sections are collected from all organs and body systems and then inspected microscopically, looking for evidence of disease or damage caused by infections, cancers, toxins or degenerative conditions.

An animal owner needs to work with their veterinarian to submit an animal for a post-mortem examination as soon after death as possible, and the animal should



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be held at refrigeration temperatures until it arrives at the pathology service. Your veterinarian can give you an estimate on the cost of a complete post-mortem examination. Private veterinarians may elect to perform necropsy examinations themselves and submit collected tissues for microscopic examination and other testing.

Testing of pet food for unknown toxicants is extremely expensive. Diagnostic information from the veterinarian is required to rule out non-toxicological causes of death and, if a toxic cause is not ruled out, determine what type of toxicology testing is needed. Our laboratory does perform pet food toxicological testing at the request of veterinarians and pet food manufacturers. Pet owners must work with their veterinarians in order to have pet foods tested.

It may cost \$1000 or more to begin running broad-based toxicological analyses on feed samples depending on what toxins are suspected, but when testing multiple samples or for multiple toxins costs can quickly skyrocket. All samples must be submitted to us by a licensed veterinarian. It is very important that the food submitted to the laboratory be representative of that eaten by the animal when it was suspected of making the animal sick. For some toxins, the feed may be completely consumed before the animal shows any sign of illness. If the food is gone, a clinical examination of the animal while it is alive or a post-mortem examination is an absolute necessity for determining the cause of illness and/or death. Extensive medical examination and follow-up laboratory testing usually result in a diagnosis, but be aware that occasionally even the best veterinarians and laboratories are unable to find the cause of illness.

Veterinarians may contact the Animal Health Diagnostic Center for information about toxicology testing of pet foods or of samples taken from sick or deceased pets. In general, submitted pet food samples should be accompanied by complete clinical histories, copies of clinical testing results, and, if appropriate, copies of necropsy and histology reports.