

For the first time, FDA addresses pet food safety

By Sandra Young, CNN

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The FDA is proposing a new rule aimed at keeping animals and people from becoming sick.

(CNN) -- For the first time, the Food and Drug Administration is taking steps to make animal feed and pet food sold in the United States safer.

A new proposed rule issued Friday aims to protect all animal foods from disease-causing bacteria, chemicals and other contaminants.

Under the rule, manufacturers will be required to develop procedures to prevent foodborne illness. For the first time,

manufacturing facilities would have to follow proposed good manufacturing practices to address issues like sanitation. They will also have to have plans in place to correct any problems.

"Unlike safeguards already in place to protect human foods, there are currently no regulations governing the safe production of most animal foods," said [Daniel McChesney](#), director of the Office of Surveillance and Compliance at FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine, in a statement. "There is no type of hazard analysis. This rule would change all that."

The agency said its goal is preventing any transmission of contaminants that could cause animals and people to become sick.

If an animal eats contaminated food, McChesney noted, people can become sick if an animal enters the food supply. In addition, pet food contaminated with bacteria such as Salmonella can sicken people if pet owners handle the food, for example, or place it on a counter.

"The FDA continues to take steps to meet the challenge of ensuring a safe food supply," said FDA Commissioner Dr. Margaret Hamburg in a statement. "Today's announcement addresses a critical part of the food system, and we will continue to work with our national and international industry, consumer and government partners as we work to prevent foodborne illness."

The new rule complements proposed rules published in January aimed at produce safety and facilities that manufacture food for humans, said Michael Taylor, deputy commissioner for Foods and Veterinary Medicine.

"They also work in concert with standards proposed in July 2013 to help ensure that imported foods are as safe as those produced domestically."

There have been a number of pet food recalls over the last few years, according to McChesney.

In 2007, melamine -- a chemical used to make plastic -- was intentionally added to pet food ingredients made in China, killing pets and sparking a [massive recall](#). Last year, a Salmonella outbreak at a facility in South Carolina led to the recall of 30,000 tons of dry dog and cat food. Forty-seven people in 20 states and two in Canada became ill after handling the contaminated food.

McChesney says the problem is serious and that for years public health agencies around the world have had to deal with [dioxin](#) in animal food ingredients that led to multiple recalls. Dioxin is a toxic chemical linked to cancer and developmental delays in humans.

"The bottom line is that we want the foods that animals eat to be safe," McChesney said. "We want you to be safe if you're handling pet food or eating foods derived from animals. This rule will help us do that."

[Three public meetings](#) will be held on the proposed rule in the coming months. The first will be held November 21 in College Park, Maryland. The second will be November 25 in Chicago, and the third December 6 in Sacramento, California.

The proposed rule comes after the FDA earlier this week [reached out to veterinarians and consumers](#) looking for help with an investigation into why jerky treats made mostly in the United States and China are making thousands of dogs and a few cats sick.

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