



Alternative Veterinary Services, LLC

9 Hodges Street, North Andover, MA 01845

978-683-5775 fax: 978-409-1269

<http://AltVetServices.com>

Office@altvetservices.com

What about raw diets?

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), signed into law in 2011, is designed to keep the nation's food supply safe and dramatically decrease the number of foodborne illnesses. It regulates human and animal food safety measures.¹

Under FSMA regulations, there are a number of pathogens that may be present in raw meat that is meant for human consumption (e.g., sold at the grocery store) – including *Salmonella* spp, *Campylobacter* spp, *Clostridium* spp, *Escherichia coli*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and enterotoxigenic *Staphylococcus aureus*. For example, cut up raw chicken parts may contain as high as 15.4% of pathogens without triggering a recall! This is acceptable because this meat being sold is going to be cooked (which will kill the pathogens) before consumed.² The CDC estimates that one in twenty-five packages of raw chicken at the grocery store is contaminated with salmonella.³

Food that is considered “ready to eat” has been prepared in a way so that no further heating (cooking) is required (although for some items, such as canned soup, it is common). Examples of “ready to eat” foods include baked goods, canned items, produce, some animal products (e.g., cheese), and shelf-stable products such as cereals and candy.⁴ Under FSMA regulations, there is a zero-tolerance policy for any pathogens in these foods. There must be immediate regulatory action if any contamination is found at any time (resulting in recalls). Commercial pet foods are considered “ready to eat” and are therefore subject to the same regulations.²

But what about the frozen raw meat that is marketed and sold as pet food? Those products are also considered “ready to eat” and subject to the same regulations. So the meat at the grocery store intended for human consumption may have some pathogens but the raw meat sold as pet food cannot? True. There are two ways typically used to kill the pathogens in raw pet food – irradiation and high pressure processing (HPP). HPP has become the industry standard for raw pet food processing. Basically, the raw meat is packaged for sale and then put in a large water tank. The tank is then sealed and filled with cold water at extreme pressure. At a specific time, the water is suddenly released. This combination of added pressure plus sudden release kills pathogens. Turns out that this is extremely effective on food that is rich with moisture, such as meat. HPP human food products first came on the market in 1990, and this technology is used commonly for human food products such as guacamole, raw juices, hummus, salsa, potato and pasta salad, shellfish, soups, preservative-free lunchmeats, and sauces. Some large companies such as Costco use it extensively with both uncooked and ready to eat meat products.²

The American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) position on feeding raw or under-cooked animal products is as follows: “The AVMA discourages the feeding to cats and dogs of any animal-source protein that has not first been subjected to a process to eliminate pathogens because of the risk of illness to cats and dogs as well as humans. Cooking or pasteurization through the application of heat until the protein reaches an internal temperature adequate to destroy pathogenic organisms has been the traditional method used to eliminate pathogens in animal-source protein, although the AVMA recognizes that newer technologies and other methods such as irradiation are constantly being developed and implemented.”⁵

Note that heating food to temperatures over 160 degrees fahrenheit denatures proteins, reducing their nutritive value.⁶ Raw diets are more nutritious, however, cannot be construed as complete nutrition. Consult your veterinarian for more information.

¹ [Food Safety Modernization Act \(FSMA\) | FDA](#)

² [High Pressure Processing in Raw Dog Food - Whole Dog Journal \(whole-dog-journal.com\)](#)

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/chicken.html>

⁴ [What Is a Ready to Eat Food? \(sfgate.com\)](#)

⁵ <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/avma-policies/raw-or-undercooked-animal-source-protein-cat-and-dog-diets>

⁶ *Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats*, Pitcairn, Richard, and Pitcairn, Susan, 1st edition, 1982, Rodale Press