

AAHA joins AVMA, passes raw protein statement

Feeding a raw protein diet can endanger the health of both people and animals, according to the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA).

AAHA plans to release a position statement discouraging pet owners from feeding raw protein diets later this week.

The second major veterinary group to take a stand on raw protein diets in recent weeks, AAHA says it is doing so because it wants to strengthen the valued relationship between human and animal.

"We value the relationships between our pets and their families – we want to strengthen the human-animal bond by keeping both pets and people as healthy as possible," said Michael Cavanaugh, DVM, executive director of AAHA.

AAHA joins the likes of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), which passed a policy discouraging the feeding of raw protein diets at its yearly conference in San Diego in early August 2012.

AAHA leaders say its statement on raw protein diets was actually developed and passed by its board of directors prior to the AVMA policy. According to AAHA, the statement was developed without any input or knowledge from the AVMA.

The text of the AAHA statement emphasizes the danger of feeding pathogenic organisms to animals that may then shed those organisms through their stool, creating danger for both humans and animals that may come in contact with it.

"Homemade raw food diets are unsafe because retail meats for human consumption can be contaminated with pathogens," the statement reads. "Studies that have been done on both commercially available and homemade raw protein diets have found a high percentage (30–50%) of them contaminated with pathogenic organisms, and up to 30% of the dogs fed such diets may shed pathogenic organisms in their stool. Many of the pathogens found in raw protein diets can be transmitted to the human population by contact with the food itself, pet or environmental surfaces. A disturbing number of these organisms have also been shown to be resistant to multiple antimicrobials."

After publicizing its own raw diet policy, the AVMA received a flurry of online comments and discussion from consumers attacking the organization for its stance on the controversial topic. Many consumers have questioned the prudence of feeding commercial kibble in light of recalled dog foods that have sickened animals and humans alike.

On the website [The truth about pet food.com](http://www.truthaboutpetfood.com) (http://www.truthaboutpetfood.com/articles/very-bad-news-for-raw-feeders.html/t_blank), author Susan Thixton supported raw protein diets, arguing that raw pet food isn't any more dangerous than a visit to the meat department of the local grocery store.

"...All meat is dangerous. We, pet owners...take a risk each time you pick up a package of ground beef or chicken legs at the grocery. Raw pet food is NO more dangerous than any trip to the meat department of any grocery across the country," Thixton wrote. "However, there is one significant difference...most all pet owners that feed a raw meat pet food are fully aware of the risk. They are educated pet food consumers and they understand the need to handle the food properly. Perhaps this is reason why there has never been an incident of human illness linked to a raw meat pet food."

AAHA says its statement rests on scientific evidence revealing raw food diets to be a threat to other animals and humans.

"Past proponents of raw food diets believed that this was the healthiest food choice for pets," the statement reads. "It was also assumed that feeding such a diet would cause no harm to other animals or to humans. There have subsequently been multiple studies showing both these premises to be false. Based on overwhelming scientific evidence, AAHA does not advocate or endorse feeding pets any raw or dehydrated nonsterilized foods, including treats that are of animal origin."

The AAHA statement is based on over 50 different scientific citations.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) and the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV) have both announced their support for the AAHA statement with official endorsements.

"The National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians strongly supports, affirms, and endorses the 2012 position statement by the American Animal Hospital Association regarding raw protein diets," the NASPHV wrote in support of the AAHA statement. "Raw protein diets are a public health concern because the pathogens can be transmitted to humans via contact with the food itself, the animal, or contaminated surfaces."