



## Pet Partners<sup>®</sup> Position on Raw Meat Diets

### It's not about your dog.

Our priority is the safety of those interacting with therapy animals. Therapy animals frequently interact with people whose immune systems are not optimal due to age, stress level, physical condition, or medical history. It is our responsibility to reduce unnecessary risk of exposure to zoonotic disease.

### The research is in.

Raw meat diets can be contaminated with bacteria, including *Salmonella*, *E coli*, *Listeria*, *Clostridium*, and *Campylobacter*. We know animals eating raw meat diets are more likely to shed a variety of potentially disease-causing bacteria (Joffe et al, 2002; Finley et al, 2007). A recent study specifically of therapy animals demonstrated that 61% of raw meat-consuming dogs were shedding *Salmonellae* at some point during the yearlong study, compared with 8% of other dogs (Lefebvre et al., 2008). Of even greater concern is the issue of antibiotic resistance. A study found that 21% of all raw meat diets sampled were contaminated with *Salmonella* and that these bacteria showed resistance to 75% of the antibiotics tested (Finley et al, 2008), and raw meat feeding has been linked to higher rates of shedding highly drug resistant *E. coli* (Lefebvre et al. 2008).

### These infections can be deadly.

While you may associate *Salmonella* with an unpleasant but simple incident of food poisoning, that's not the case for those with compromised immune systems. *Salmonella* and *Listeria*, both detected in raw pet foods (Nemser et al., 2014), were listed as two of the leading causes of death related to foodborne illness in the United States in 2011 (Scallan et al., 2011).

### We know other groups allow it.

According to a recent survey of therapy animal organizations, only 19% of respondents prohibit raw diets for therapy animals (Linder et al, 2017). Pet Partners is proud to promote the highest evidence-based standards for therapy animals to ensure visits are both safe and effective. Review the comprehensive standards all therapy animals should adhere to at [www.petpartners.org/standards](http://www.petpartners.org/standards)

### We should all protect access to therapy animals.

A single infection incident attributed to therapy animals eating raw diet could jeopardize the entire future of animal-assisted interventions. Should that happen, it wouldn't be difficult to imagine facilities banning all animals to reduce the risk of zoonotic infection. While we understand that prohibiting raw feeding for therapy animals doesn't eliminate the risk, it does reduce the risk. And if that helps preserve the life-affirming impact of therapy animals in hospitals, assisted living, and other clinical settings, that's what we must do.

### Key Sources

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Lefebvre SL, Reid-Smith R, Boerlin P, Weese JS. Evaluation of the risk of shedding salmonellae and other potential pathogens by therapy dogs fed raw diets in Ontario and Alberta. *Zoonoses and Public Health* 2008; 55: 470-480.

Linder D, Siebens H, Mueller M, et al. Animal-assisted interventions: A national survey of health and safety policies in hospitals, eldercare facilities, and therapy animal organizations. *American Journal of Infection Control* 2017; 45: 1-7

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Scallan E, Hoekstra RM, Angulo FJ, et al. Foodborne illness acquired in the United States—Major pathogens. *Emerging Infectious Diseases Journal* 2011; 17: 7–15.



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