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Salmonella infections related to raw pet food

The BC Centre for Disease Control is collaborating with BC health authorities, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and Health Canada to investigate an outbreak of *Salmonella* infections in British Columbia likely related to raw pet food. Raw pet food is food served to pets that contains raw animal proteins like meat, bones, organs, and eggs.

Four British Columbians who feed their pets raw food diets have become infected with the same strain of *Salmonella*. The exact source of the *Salmonella* is unknown but investigations are ongoing. Infections can occur during handling of raw meat, including raw pet food, or from pets shedding the bacteria. Animals can carry *Salmonella* bacteria but show no signs of illness.

Both raw pet food and raw meats often contain bacteria that can lead to illness in people. People are being reminded to wash their hands immediately after handling raw pet food or raw meat, and before touching anything else. Pet owners should also wash their hands after handling or cleaning up after their pet, especially prior to preparing their own food or eating. Other ways to prevent *Salmonella* infections are to avoid contact between raw meats and other uncooked foods, to use separate cutting boards for raw meats, and to wash and sanitize items such as pet food bowls, cutting boards, utensils, counters, kitchen sinks and tap handles.

Salmonella are bacteria that infect the intestinal tract and sometimes the blood, and are a common cause of diarrhea in B.C. and around the world. Symptoms of *Salmonella* typically start 6 to 72 hours after exposure to the organism and can include:

- stomach cramps
- diarrhea
- fever
- nausea
- vomiting
- dehydration, especially in infants and the elderly

Symptoms last 4 to 7 days and most people recover without treatment. People who experience severe symptoms, or who have underlying medical conditions, should contact their health-care providers if they suspect they have a *Salmonella* infection.