

FDA Looking For Help In Identifying Deadly Treats

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration is appealing to dog and cat owners for information as it struggles to solve a mysterious outbreak of illness and deaths among pets that ate jerky treats. In a notice to consumers and veterinarians published Tuesday, the agency said it has linked illnesses from jerky pet treats to 3,600 dogs and 10 cats since 2007. About 580 of those pets have died.

The FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine has run more than 1,200 tests, visited pet treat manufacturing plants in China and worked with researchers, state labs and foreign governments but hasn't determined the exact cause of the illness, the FDA statement said. "This is one of the most elusive and mysterious outbreaks we've encountered," Bernadette Dunham, a veterinarian and head of the FDA vet medicine center, said in the statement. Pets can suffer from a decreased appetite, decreased activity, vomiting and diarrhea among other symptoms within hours of eating treats sold as jerky tenders or strips made of chicken, duck, sweet potatoes or dried fruit.

Severe cases have involved kidney failure, gastrointestinal bleeding, and a rare kidney disorder, the FDA said. Most of the jerky treats implicated have been made in China, the FDA said.

The FDA has issued previous warnings. A number of jerky pet treat products were removed from the market in January after a New York state lab reported finding evidence of up to six drugs in certain jerky pet treats made in China, the FDA said. The agency said that while the levels of the drugs were very low and it was unlikely that they caused the illnesses, there was a decrease in reports of jerky-suspected illnesses after the products were removed from the market. The FDA believes that the number of reports may have declined simply because fewer jerky treats were available.

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