Most US dog owners don't follow FDA pet food handling guidelines: study

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To help clarify, Dr. Luisana and colleagues surveyed 417 dog owners. They found that less than 5 percent were aware of the guidelines, and many owners did not follow many of the recommendations. For instance, only one third reported washing their hands after feeding, and only two thirds reported preparing dog food on separate surfaces from those used for human food. The latter fact is of potential public health importance, but is not addressed in the FDA recommendations.

To better understand the effects of the FDA recommendations, the researchers tested 68 household dog food dishes for bacterial contamination. After initial testing, they divided the owners into three groups with different instructions for implementing food handling guidelines, then tested the dishes again after 1 week. They found significantly reduced contamination of dishes from owners who instituted the FDA's pet food handling guidelines, either alone or in combination with the FDA's human food handling protocol, versus dishes from owners who were not asked to implement either protocol.

The researchers note that their study was small and that future research could clarify optimal hygiene strategies and ways to communicate them.

Nonetheless, on the basis of their findings, the researchers outline suggestions to reduce contamination in pet food dishes for owners, veterinarians, pet food sellers and manufacturers. These include ensuring household members who feed pets adhere to FDA guidelines and including written information on guidelines with pet food sales.

The authors add: "Most pet owners are unaware that pet food bowls can be a hidden source of bacteria in the household. Knowing how to mitigate this risk and practice proper pet food storage and hygiene may make for a happier, healthier
household."


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