

Avian Influenza A (H5N1) & Feeding Raw Diets

The feeding of raw or undercooked meat, specifically poultry-based diets including chicken, turkey and duck, has been implicated as a cause of infection with H5N1 in cats.

Are there safety measures to make sure raw food is clear of H5N1?

High-pressure pasteurization (HPP) of raw diets:

HPP of raw food products uses high pressure (rather than high heat, as in cooking) to reduce contamination with bacteria and viruses. Many commercial raw diets for pets are high pressure pasteurized, however infections with Salmonella and other bacteria have still been documented in cats eating HPP foods.

**High pressure pasteurization should be considered a risk reduction step, not a risk elimination step.*

Frozen raw diets:

Freezing is an effective preservation method for viruses, so it's unlikely that these methods substantially reduce the risk of viral contamination in raw diets. While the survival kinetics of H5N1 virus freezing are not clear, it should be assumed that the virus could survive frozen for at least a week or longer.

**Freezing should not be assumed to be a risk mitigation measure for H5N1 contamination of raw diets.*

Freeze-Dried raw diets:

Survival of H5N1 in freeze-dried food has not been yet assessed, but in the

absence of specific evidence, it is reasonable to assume that influenza virus would survive in such diets.

**Freeze-Dried diets should not be assumed to be a risk mitigation measure for H5N1 contamination of raw diets.*

My cat is doing well on a raw diet, and I don't want to change. What can I do?

Cooking raw food to an internal temperature of 165°F/74°C will inactivate influenza virus and other pathogens such as Salmonella, while still maintaining the health benefits of a diet.

I am not sure if I want to continue to feed a Raw Diet, what should I do?

At the current time, it is ideal to transition the cat to a cooked diet, whether that's a commercial wet or dry diet, a home-cooked diet or cooking the cat's current raw diet.

Other recommendations include:

- Avoid diets that contain poultry (including duck)
- Use a diet treated with high pressure pasteurization (reduces risk, but does not eliminate it)
- Take care to avoid cross contamination of human food,

and use good food handling and hygiene practices

- If your pet has been fed raw meat and gets sick, make sure your veterinarian knows about the diet so they can consider whether that might be relevant
- Pay attention to the news and recalls so that you can stop feeding a diet if there are any known issues (but realize that it takes time to officially recall a diet and may not happen until one or more animals get really sick or dies from the diet)

Additional Resources



[CatFriendly.com](https://www.catfriendly.com)



[CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)



[AVMA.org](https://www.avma.org)



[faithfulfriends
vc.com/cats](https://www.faithfulfriendsvc.com/cats)