

I stopped giving my dog chicken jerky treats a while ago but I was wondering if anything has ever been found to explain why dogs have died from eating them?

There have been lots of warnings over the past seven years to avoid feeding your dog jerky treats made in China. This followed the widespread problem of contaminated dog and cat food from China that eventually was found to contain melamine. Since 2007, there have been many dogs reportedly getting sick, developing gastrointestinal, neurological or kidney disease and dying after consuming various jerky treats. The Food and Drug Administration has received 4,800 jerky treat related complaints since 2007. These include the death of over 1,000 dogs.

Recent research has focused on testing samples of chicken jerky treats collected from veterinarians across the country whose patients became ill after eating them. Chemical analysis shows that the treats had two adulterants, the insect repellent DEET and the drug amantadine. DEET is generally used as an insect repellent and also a pesticide. Amantadine is a drug used to treat Parkinson's disease and some types of influenza virus infections in people, and for pain management in dogs. Poultry farmers may have been using it to prevent Avian Influenza in their flocks, but it is illegal to use in poultry in the U.S. The pathologist involved in the study notes that the residues found constitute contamination, but is not sure that the symptoms demonstrated by the affected dogs in these jerky treat cases match the possible side effects of the contaminants. So far, the Chinese-made treats have not been recalled by the FDA and are still being sold in many stores in the U.S.

You may think avoiding pet treats that are labeled "Made in China" is the answer to keeping your dog safe from a toxic reaction. Unfortunately, packages labeled as "Made in the USA" are permitted by the FDA to contain ingredients sourced from other countries without specifying that information on the label. The only way to know if any of the ingredients are from another country is to contact the manufacturer of the product and ask the right person. Some dog owners have chosen to reduce the risk of commercial treats and make their own dog treats with ingredients they trust. If you have the time and the interest, that may be your best option for now.

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