

Puppy Selling Pet Stores' Threat to Human Health

Background: For years, puppy mills and pet stores have addressed the fact that many of their puppies are sick, or likely to become sick, by pumping them with antibiotics. This practice has led to an **ongoing antibiotic-resistant disease outbreak** among pet store puppies and the people that interact with them. The pet store industry has yet to take meaningful action to stop the outbreak.

In September 2021, the American Medical Association published an [article](#) on the “increasing public health threat” of antibiotic-resistant *Campylobacter* infections linked to pet store puppies. The following findings were published:

- **Campylobacter strains have been circulating for at least 10 years and continue to cause illness among pet store customers, employees, and others who encounter pet store puppies.**
- Failure of traditional antibiotics led to complications as “several patients had prolonged hospital admission after multiple courses of antibiotics to which their strain was resistant.” (25% of the 126 *Campylobacter* patients studied were hospitalized.)
- The “extensively drug-resistant strains were **only found in the commercial dog industry** and have not been associated with exposure to dogs from animal shelters, indicating these strains might have a niche in commercial breeding and distribution of pet store puppies.”
- Public health recommendations to reduce illness among dogs, customers, and store employees were provided to Petland, other pet stores, and the general veterinary community but illnesses have continued to occur.



Petland employee in an ambulance after contracting *Campylobacter*. (WSB-TV 2)

Since 2017, the CDC has warned of the public health risk associated with pet store puppies. The agency published multiple [outbreak advisories](#), [notices of ongoing investigations](#), and a [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) on pet stores and *Campylobacter* that reported the following:

- 118 persons, including 29 pet store employees, in 18 states, as of September 2018, were identified to have *Campylobacter* strains that were resistant to all antibiotics commonly used to treat such infections
- **95% of pet store puppies were given antibiotics before arriving or while at the store**, with a median antibiotic treatment duration of 15 days; just 1% received antibiotics for treatment only
- Implementation of antibiotic stewardship principles and practices in the commercial dog industry is needed, and antibiotics should only be administered under veterinary supervision

Public records obtained by the HSUS provided the following additional information:

- In April 2020, CDC official Dr. Robert Tauxe wrote: “Recent investigations led by CDC and state health departments indicate that *Campylobacter* is still being transmitted to people through pet store puppies... CDC is concerned that the risk to employees exposed to puppies sold in pet stores is continuing.”
- In January 2018 Dr. Tauxe wrote: **“The puppy story is not over – it is difficult to control with a whole system that lacks hygiene at many points and seems to use antibiotics instead.”**
- Petland—the leader of the puppy store industry—hindered the CDC’s investigation by providing incomplete information and demanding lawyers be involved. CDC officials asked Petland to start cooperating with their investigation, writing: “It is not our standard operating procedure to have firms and their attorneys work directly with our state public health partners ... we are still waiting for information from Petland...Any further delay in providing this information to CDC hinders our ability to conduct a thorough and expedient investigation, which in turn hinders our ability to prevent potential additional infections.”