

FOOD SAFETY RECALLS AND YOUR FAMILY

Biological Emergencies



Food recalls are necessary to protect the public from unsafe or contaminated food products. It is important to stay informed about current recalls and to know what to do in case of a recall to protect yourself and your family.

What is a Food Recall?

Recalls are procedures used to identify and recover potentially adulterated, misbranded, and/or hazardous foods in order to prevent potential food safety problems or economic fraud.

- **A recall is conducted by the responsible company.**
 - To remove or correct a product being sold that is or would be considered violation of their federal, state, or local food laws.
 - To protect the public from products that may cause health problems or possible death.
- **There are a number of situations that can result in a food product recall. Some are emergency situations; others are not.**
 - Examples include allergens, foreign objects, chemical or bacterial contamination, illness or communicable diseases, misbranding, packaging defects.
- **There are three different classes of recalls, depending on the severity of the suspected problem.**
 - **Class I:** Dangerous or defective products that could cause serious health problems or death.
 - **Class II:** Products that might cause a temporary health problem, or pose only a slight threat of a serious nature.
 - **Class III:** Use of products that are unlikely to cause any adverse health reaction, but violate FDA labeling or manufacturing laws.

Who Decides When a Recall is Necessary?

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA FSIS) are the federal authorities that govern food recalls.
 - FSIS has authority over meat, poultry and processed egg products.
 - FDA has authority over most other food products, as well as human and animal drugs, medical devices, human vaccines, animal feed, and cosmetics.
- Local or state agencies may coordinate voluntary recalls for firms operating within their jurisdiction, or assist federal regulators with recall investigations.
- Many state agencies also have the authority to embargo or seize adulterated or misbranded products if a firm does not adequately remove products from commerce.

- **Food recalls are generally voluntary.**
 - They are initiated by the manufacturer or distributor upon request of the Federal agencies (i.e., FDA, FSIS).
 - Federal agencies can take more stringent actions if,
 - A product poses a significant risk to human health.
 - The manufacturer or distributor is unwilling to launch a voluntary recall.
 - The agency decides the company's voluntary action is ineffective.

Food Recall Process

- **Unsafe products are discovered by several methods:**
 - Identification by the manufacturer or distributor
 - Consumer hotlines
 - Sample testing or routine inspections by state or federal agencies
 - Consumer health issues detected by state and local health departments
- **Once the recall is issued, it is considered complete only when:**
 - The company's corrective actions have been deemed appropriate.
 - All of the product is suitably destroyed or reconditioned.
 - An investigation is conducted to determine why and how the product was defective.

Reporting a Suspected Food Safety Problem

If you suspect a problem with a food product,

- **Call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline.**
 - For help with meat, poultry, and egg products
 - Call 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854).
- **Call the Food and Drug Administration.**
 - For complaints about other food products, such as cereal, fruits, vegetables
 - Call 1-888-723-3366 (1-888-SAFEFOOD).
- **Contact your State Health Department.**
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/international/relres.html>
- **Have the following information ready:**
 - The brand name, product name, and manufacturer of the product
 - The original container/packaging
 - Any foreign object you may have found in the product
 - Any uneaten portion of the food
 - Where and when you bought it
 - Your name, address, and phone number

Food Safety Recall Alerts

- Recall notices can be found in the news, at your local grocery store or online at www.recalls.gov.
- You can also sign up for food safety recall alert emails at www.foodsafety.gov/keep/recalls/index.html.

What to Do with Recalled Products

When a food recall alert is issued, it usually includes information to help you identify whether you have the product in your pantry, refrigerator, or freezer and advises you what to do with it.

- **Check the recall notice.**
 - Manufacturers will provide information on what to do with the product.
 - Typically, the instructions will tell you to either return the product to the store where you bought it for a refund, or to dispose of the product properly (especially if it has been opened).
 - The recall of one product does not mean all forms of that product are a potential problem.
 - Occasionally recalls will be expanded to include additional products as more information is gathered.
- **To identify if a recall product is in your home,**
 - Match identifying marks of the product with the recall notice details, such as:
 - . Product name and brand
 - . Container size and codes
- **Do not panic.**
 - Most recalls are not associated with a food illness outbreak, and many are issued because there is a potential for the food to be contaminated. Often recalls are issued as a precautionary measure.
- **Do not eat the food.**
 - Even if you believe the recall to be just a precaution, do not eat the food! It is better to be safe than sorry.
 - Do not donate the food to food banks or feed it to your pets.
- **Do not open the food container.**
 - Opening the food and checking it can potentially release bacteria or viruses that cause food illnesses into your home.
 - If you do open or handle the product, wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap.
- **Preserve the evidence.**
 - If a portion of the suspect food is available, keep it, wrap it securely, mark "DANGER" and freeze it.
 - Save all packaging materials (e.g., cans, labels, cartons).
 - Save all purchase receipts.

- **Seek treatment if necessary.**
 - If you become ill and believe your illness is due to a food product, contact your healthcare provider.
- **Call your local health department if the suspect food was served at a large gathering, from a restaurant or other food service facility.**

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