

FDA News

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FDA Notifies Consumers that Tomatoes in Restaurants Linked to *Salmonella* Typhimurium Outbreak

Current Information Suggests Outbreak is Not Ongoing

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) today announced the results of an investigation by state and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) investigators, which found consuming tomatoes in restaurants as the cause of illnesses in the *Salmonella* Typhimurium outbreak. To date, 21 states have reported 183 cases of illnesses to the CDC.

Salmonella

can cause serious and sometimes fatal infections in young children, frail or elderly people, and others with weakened immune systems. Healthy persons often experience fever, diarrhea (which may be bloody), nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain. In rare circumstances, infection can result in the organism getting into the bloodstream and producing more severe illnesses.

Based on information currently available from the CDC, the investigation shows a peak in cases of illness in late September. This suggests that the outbreak is not ongoing. The agency believes that the tomatoes that caused the illnesses have at this point been consumed, destroyed or thrown out because they are perishable. Therefore, FDA does not believe a consumer warning about tomatoes on store shelves is warranted at this time.

FDA has initiated a traceback of these tomatoes and continues its close collaboration with the CDC and state and local authorities to identify the source of contamination on tomatoes in this outbreak. In particular, FDA is working closely with the states of Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, since groups of illnesses were specifically reported in these states.

Investigations of foodborne illness usually begin at the local health department level. A variety of scientific and technological methods to trace the source of reported illnesses are used. Modern technologies, such as PulseNet (the network of public health laboratories that performs "DNA fingerprinting"), have greatly improved the speed and precision of these types of investigations.

In light of recent outbreaks, FDA continues to emphasize consumer advice to reduce the risk of foodborne illness, including *Salmonella*-related illness, from fresh produce:

Buying Tips for Fresh Produce

- Purchase produce that is not bruised or damaged.
- When selecting fresh cut produce - such as a half a watermelon or bagged mixed salad greens - choose only those items that are refrigerated or surrounded by ice.
- Bag fresh fruits and vegetables separately from meat, poultry and seafood products when packing them to take home from the market.

Storage Tips for Fresh Produce

- Certain perishable fresh fruits and vegetables (like strawberries, lettuce, herbs, and mushrooms) can be best maintained by storing in a clean refrigerator at a temperature of 40° F or below. If you're not sure whether an item should be refrigerated to maintain quality, ask your grocer.
- All produce that is purchased pre-cut or peeled should be refrigerated within two hours to maintain both quality and safety.
- Keep your refrigerator set at 40° F or below. Use a refrigerator thermometer to check!

Preparation Tips for Fresh Produce

- Many pre-cut, bagged produce items like lettuce are pre-washed. If so, it will be stated on the

- packaging. This pre-washed, bagged produce can be used without further washing.
- As an extra measure of caution, you can wash the produce again just before you use it. Pre-cut or pre-washed produce in open bags should be washed before using.
 - Begin with clean hands. Wash your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after preparing fresh produce.
 - Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on fresh fruits and vegetables before preparing and/or eating. Produce that looks rotten should be discarded.
 - All unpackaged fruits and vegetables, as well as those packaged and not marked pre-washed, should be thoroughly washed before eating. This includes produce grown conventionally or organically at home, or produce that is purchased from a grocery store or farmer's market. Wash fruits and vegetables under running water just before eating, cutting or cooking.
 - Even if you plan to peel the produce before eating, it is still important to wash it first.
 - Washing fruits and vegetables with soap or detergent or using commercial produce washes is not recommended.
 - Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush.
 - Drying produce with a clean cloth towel or paper towel may further reduce bacteria that may be present.

Separate for Safety

Keep fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw separate from other foods, such as raw meat, poultry or seafood - and from kitchen utensils used for those products.

In addition, be sure to:

- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot water and soap between the preparation of raw meat, poultry and seafood products and the preparation of produce that will not be cooked.
- For added protection, kitchen sanitizers can be used on cutting boards and counter tops periodically. Try a solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach to one quart of water.
- If you use plastic or other non-porous cutting boards, run them through the dishwasher after use.

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[CDC Information on Salmonella Outbreak](#)

www.fightbac.org

[FDA Press Release](#) (Nov. 2, 2006)

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