

# Food Recalls and Alerts: What You Should Know

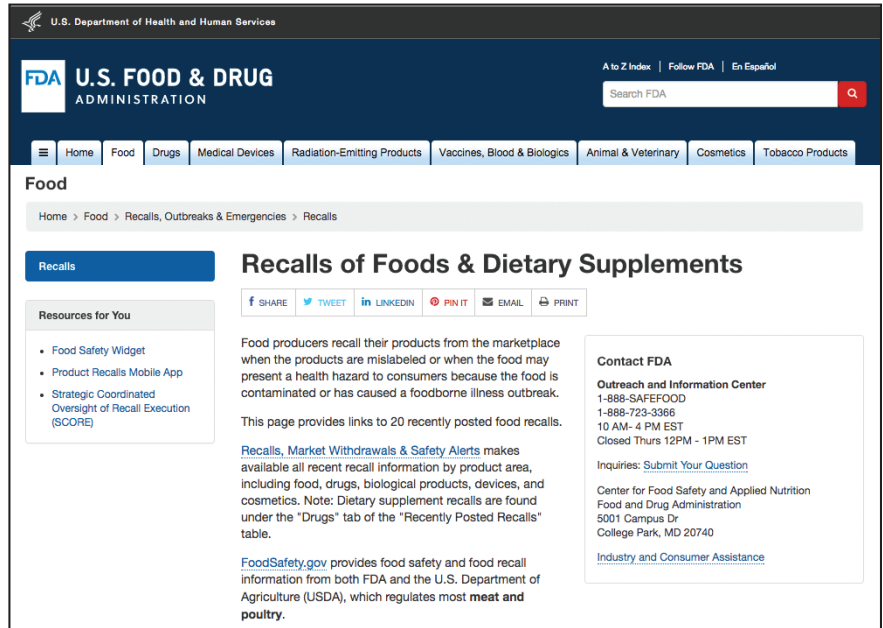
Revised by Sonja Koukel<sup>1</sup>

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Visit the FDA food recall page at <http://nmsu.life/FDArecalls> for information on current recalls of foods and dietary supplements.

For the most part, food recalls and alerts are voluntary actions taken by a manufacturer or distributor. In some situations, food recalls are requested by government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

**Recalls** occur when there is reason to believe that a food is unsafe for public consumption. Generally, recalled foods have been linked to health problems or death. The purpose of a recall is to remove the food products from store shelves, home pantries, and distribution centers in order to protect the public.

**Alerts** are issued when there are undeclared ingredients discovered in food products that may cause allergic reactions (referred to as “allergens”). Wheat, soy, tree nuts, egg products, and other foods can cause serious or life-threatening allergic reactions in some people. If you do not have sensitivity to the identified allergen, the product is safe for consumption. Usually, alerts are sent along with a recall.

Recalls and alerts are issued for foods marketed for consumption by both humans and domesticated animals such as dogs, cats, and birds. Some reasons for recalling food products include:

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- Discovery of an organism in a product that has the potential to cause health problems and, possibly, death.
- Discovery of a potential allergen in a product.
- Discovery of mislabeling or misbranding of food. For example, not listing possible allergens on the product label.

### WHEN A RECALL HAPPENS

- **DON'T panic.** Most food recalls are not associated with illness. Many recalls are issued because there is a potential for the food to be contaminated. Most often, food manufacturers issue a recall as a precautionary measure. Understand that a recall of one product does not mean that all forms of that product pose a risk.
- **DON'T eat the food.** Even though the product may be recalled as a precaution, do not eat it. It's always better to be safe than sorry. Don't donate or give the food to others. Don't feed the food to your pets—pets can get food poisoning, too.
- **DON'T open the food.** Resist the temptation to open the food packaging and check it. Generally, you can't see, smell, or taste the bacteria or organisms that cause food-related illnesses. If you do open or handle the product, wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap for 20 seconds. The best defense against food-borne illness is good hygiene.
- **DO check the recall notice for information.** When a manufacturer recalls a food product, they provide instructions on how to handle the product. Typically, the instructions will indicate you do one of the following:
  - Return the product to the place of purchase for a refund. If you ordered from a mail order or website, contact the customer service representative.
  - Dispose of the product properly to ensure other people or animals do not eat it. This is particularly important if you opened the product.

### MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

- FDA Recalls of Foods & Dietary Supplements. Available from <https://www.fda.gov/Food/RecallsOutbreaksEmergencies/Recalls/default.htm>
- FDA Recalls, Market Withdrawals, & Safety Alerts. Available from <https://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/default.htm>
- Foodsafety.gov. Recall & Alerts. Available from <http://www.FoodSafety.gov>
- Recalls.gov was created by six federal agencies to create a “one stop shop” for U.S. government recalls. Information includes recall information, how to report a dangerous product, and important safety tips. Available from <http://www.recalls.gov>

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