

Food Recalls

What is a food recall?

Food recalls occur because of bacterial or other microorganism contamination, chemical contamination, and/or physical contamination. A food manufacturer may voluntarily issue a recall to take a product off the market because there is a reason to believe that it may cause illness, or a government agency may issue a recall to protect public safety. In either case, recalls are issued to inform consumers to avoid eating the specific recalled product that could result in illness or injury.

Common reasons for issuing food recalls occur when contaminants that could be harmful if eaten are identified in the food; when a disease outbreak investigation traces illnesses to a particular food; when the product was not made according to proper manufacturing processes; when a contaminated food ingredient has been used in another product; and/or when a product is mislabeled, mispackaged, or contains an undeclared allergen.

Foodborne illnesses can range from mild symptoms, like an upset stomach, to severe symptoms requiring medical care and may even lead to death. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), approximately one in six Americans get sick from foodborne illnesses each year.

Who is responsible for food safety?

There are various government agencies that are responsible for regulating and enforcing food safety measures to ensure that the food you eat is safe. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) monitors meat, poultry, eggs, milk, and fresh produce. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates processed foods, such as canned goods, bakery items, infant formula, and juice. Here in Hawai'i, the State Department of Agriculture coordinates with the USDA FSIS to keep our local agricultural products safe, and the State Department of Health (DOH) Food and Drug Branch (FDB) is the State analogue of the U.S. FDA and regulates manufactured foods. DOH's Food Safety Branch (FSB) also plays a critical role in ensuring that food served at local food establishments are safe, in addition to regulating dairy and seafood. The U.S. CDC investigates multistate foodborne outbreaks and works with DOH's Disease Outbreak Control Division (DOCD) when investigating local foodborne outbreaks.

How do I find out about recalls?

Both USDA FSIS and U.S. FDA host websites that list all recall alerts as they are issued by food manufacturers. You can visit the USDA FSIS site here: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls>, and the U.S. FDA site here: <https://www.fda.gov/safety/recalls-market-withdrawals-safety-alerts>. Both sites also allow you to sign up for email notifications. The USDA FSIS manages recalls and notices under its jurisdiction. DOH FDB monitors the U.S. FDA site daily and will conduct an investigation if there is a likelihood that the recalled products were distributed here. In the event that the recalled products were distributed widely throughout Hawai'i, DOH FDB will issue its own press release notifying the public of the recall. Unfortunately, DOH does not have issue-specific filters for press releases, but you can subscribe to all DOH press releases (including food recalls) by contacting the DOH Communications Office at 808-586-4417 or by following DOH (@HawaiiDOH) on Twitter/X.

I think I bought that product! How do I know if it was recalled?

All USDA FSIS, U.S. FDA, and DOH FDB press releases will include identifying information to inform you if your product is subject to a recall. This includes the product name; manufacturer name; product size; date information (i.e., use-by, sell-by, best if consumed by, etc.); and specific identifiers like lot number, UPC code, batch code, or production code. In addition, the press release will include a representative image of the product under recall. If you purchased a food product that you think is subject to a recall, please first check the packaging for confirmation.

I checked, and my product is being recalled! What do I do now?

If your product is being recalled, please do not consume it. Please do not feed the recalled product to pets; they can become sick too. If unopened, do not open the product. The recall notice will give you information on whether to dispose of the product immediately or to return the product to the place of purchase for a refund. The press release may also include an email address or telephone number of the food manufacturer that you may contact for more information. If you've handled the recalled product outside of its packaging, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. You will also want to wash and

sanitize all surfaces that came in direct contact with the recalled product – microorganisms like *Listeria monocytogenes* can survive in refrigerated temperatures and can easily spread to other foods and surfaces. This includes cooking equipment, utensils, dishes, counters, refrigerators, and sinks.

Please note, if a food product is under a recall due to an undeclared allergen, anyone in your household with an allergy to that food ingredient may be at risk of exposure and you should not open the package and/or eat the food. However, if you and your household do not have an allergy to the food ingredient, it is safe to consume.

Please also note that if a certain product is being recalled, this does not mean that all other related products from that food manufacturer are also contaminated. Recalls can be very limited and specific owing to tracking and labeling information, including batch or lot numbers, to confirm which products are under a recall.

I ate the recalled food before I heard about the recall! What should I do?

All USDA FSIS, U.S. FDA, and DOH FDB press releases will include information about the possible contamination that led to the recall. This includes symptoms that may occur from consumption. If you ate the recalled food product, please monitor yourself to determine if you may be exhibiting symptoms of infection. If you do exhibit symptoms, DOH strongly suggests that you contact your healthcare provider immediately and inform them of the food recall and your symptoms.

I haven't eaten any foods that have been recently recalled, but I have some symptoms. What should I do?

If you think you have some common symptoms associated with a foodborne illness, please contact your healthcare provider and inform them of your symptoms. Please also make a list of everything you've eaten over the past two to three days to assist with any follow-up investigations. Depending on the diagnosis, your healthcare provider may contact DOH DOCD epidemiologists who may reach out to you to begin an investigation.

What else can I do to prevent foodborne illnesses?

In addition to staying up-to-date on food recalls, you can practice the following four key steps that will help to prevent foodborne illnesses: 1) Cleanliness: wash your hands before and after preparing food, and clean and sanitize food surfaces properly; 2) Avoid cross-contamination: separate raw foods from ready-to-eat foods; 3) Temperature control: always cook foods to the proper temperature; 4) Temperature control part two: chill food promptly and don't leave foods resting at room temperature for long periods of time.