



Back to Basics: About Food Recalls: Staying Informed + Finding Answers from Stop Foodborne Illness

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According to a 2009 study by the *Rutgers University Food Policy Institute*, **fewer than 60% of Americans have ever checked their homes for a recalled food item.** This suggests that, while many Americans view food recalls as important, they don't believe they're particularly relevant. With food product and ingredient recalls becoming increasingly present in our daily lives, [Stop Foodborne Illness](#) presents a basic guide to orient consumers on food recalls. From locating food recall notices to determining whether a recalled product is in your home, Stop Foodborne Illness is bringing back all the basics to help you combat harmful pathogens and keep your family safe.

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Food Recalls

How can I stay informed about food recalls?

[Stop Foodborne Illness](#) is a good source for complete, concise and up to date food recall information, culled from federal agencies such as [FSIS](#), [FDA](#), and [CFIA](#). Food recalls are often featured on local or national news broadcasts, and many grocery stores or online retailers will confirm that recalled food is removed from shelves.

Who issues recalls?

In many cases the product manufacturer or producer initiates a recall in cooperation with the federal agency of jurisdiction. Until very recently, all food recalls have been voluntary actions. However, due to FSMA the FDA can now mandate a food recall.

Who regulates food products?

The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspects and regulates meat and poultry products, and pasteurized egg products produced in federally-inspected plants. The

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates all food products not regulated by the FSIS.

How are potentially unsafe food products discovered?

Most symptoms of foodborne illness do not occur until [hours or even days](#) after consuming contaminated food. So, it is difficult to determine if a specific food product is unsafe just by simply looking at it. However, there are several ways unsafe food products are identified:

- The manufacturer or distributor may identify the problem and voluntarily inform FSIS or FDA that a potentially unsafe food product has been placed into commerce.
- The FSIS, the FDA, or a state or local regulatory agency may discover potentially unsafe food products during sample testing or routine inspections.
- Other Federal agencies like the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) or Department of Defense (DoD) may report a potential health problem to FSIS or FDA.
- Consumers may notify their local public health departments or report directly to FSIS, FDA or another government agency.

How Do I Report a Suspected Food Safety Problem?

Consumers can report adverse reactions related to food products by contacting:

- [Local Public Health Departments](#)
- FDA SAFEFOOD Information Line: 1-888-SAFEFOOD
- USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline: 1-800-MPHOTLINE (888-674-6854)

What to Look for When There's a Food Recall

You've become aware that there is a food recall, but now what? A recall alert or notice will indicate any or all the following items with which to ID a product, from this list of commonly recalled foods:

- Meat and Poultry Products
 - Product name/type
 - Product brand
 - Establishment number (Notes the plant where it was produced. May appear within inspection seal or elsewhere on packaging)
 - Product weight/size
 - Production Lot ID and/or Date Code
- Fruits and Vegetables
 - Is the recall for whole fresh produce or pre-packaged produce?
 - For whole fresh produce, individual units will have a label, but no other ID. Check with the store where you bought the product. (Keep your receipts.)
 - For Pre-packaged produce, check for brand name, best by date and production codes
- Frozen Products
 - Product name/type
 - Product brand/manufacturer
 - Product weight/size
 - Production lot code or UPC number
 - Best if used by date
- Canned Products

- Product name/type
- Product brand/manufacturer
- Product size (ounces)
- UPC number
- Other Processed Food Products
 - Product name/type
 - Product brand/manufacturer
 - Product weight/size
 - Production lot code or UPC number
 - Best if used by date
- In-store Prepared or Deli Products
 - Product type (salad, sandwich, etc.)
 - Product and/or store brand
 - Look for label information as listed in recall notice
 - Check with the store where you bought the product (including their website)

Recall Terms

How is the severity of a food recall measured? What do these classifications mean? Following is a list of recall terms, and definitions, to help you hone your Food Recall Knowledge!

- Class I Recall: Involves a dangerous or defective product that is reasonably likely to cause serious health problems or death
- Class II Recall: Involves a product that may cause temporary or medically reversible adverse health consequences
- Class III Recall: Use of or exposure to the product is *not likely to cause adverse* health consequences
- Public Health Alert: May be issued when FSIS (CDC, or State Health Department) has reason to believe that a food product may be associated with human illnesses, but cannot identify a specific product that should be recalled
- Market Withdrawal: Involves a product that is withdrawn from the market because it does not meet company quality specifications or it exhibits a minor infraction of regulatory requirements
- Establishment Number: The establishment number directly connects a meat or poultry food product to the plant at which it was produced

Food recalls are largely preventable. However, if one happens, and you know where to find food recall information, how to correctly identify the recalled item, or report a potential food safety problem, you can better protect your community from the dangers of foodborne illness. Creating a food safety plan is easy; just remember and practice the basics. Take the first step and [sign up to receive Stop Foodborne Illness e-Alerts and eNews.](#)

About Stop Foodborne Illness

Stop Foodborne Illness is a national nonprofit public health organization dedicated to the prevention of illness and death from foodborne illness by promoting sound food safety policy and best practices, building public awareness, and assisting those impacted by foodborne illness. For more food safety tips please visit <http://www.stopfoodborneillness.org/awareness/>. If you think you have been sickened

from food, contact your local health professional. You may subscribe to receive Stop Foodborne Illness e-Alerts and eNews here: <http://www.stopfoodborneillness.org/take-action/sign-up-for-e-alerts/>. For questions and personal assistance, please contact Stanley Rutledge, Community Coordinator, at srutledge@stopfoodborneillness.org or 773-269-6555 x7.