

# What to Know about Food Recalls



## What is a food recall?

A food recall occurs when a product is taken off the market because there is reason to believe it could make people sick. In some situations, government agencies may request or require a food recall. When a manufacturer decides on its own to recall a product, it is called a voluntary recall.

## Why is food recalled?

Food recalls may happen for many reasons, including but not limited to:

- Discovery of organisms, including bacteria such as Listeria.
- Discovery of foreign objects, such as broken glass or metal.
- Discovery of a major allergen that does not appear on the product label.

## I am worried that I bought or ate recalled food. What should I do?

If you bought or ate recalled food, use these four helpful steps from [FoodSafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov).

### 1. Don't panic.

Most food recalls are issued as a precaution, because there is *potential* for food to be contaminated.

### 2. Don't eat the recalled food.

Even if food is recalled voluntarily or as a precautionary measure, **do not eat it, do not serve it to anyone else, and do not donate it to a food bank**. This includes giving it to pets, who can get foodborne illnesses, too.

### 3. Don't open the food.

Resist the urge to open the food and check it. Bacteria or viruses that cause foodborne illness cannot be seen, smelled, or tasted.

If you do open or handle the food, be sure to wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and warm water.

If a surface came into contact with contaminated food, wash and sanitize it thoroughly.

### 4. Check the recall notice.

When a product is recalled, the manufacturer will provide specific instructions in a recall notice. You can view all recall notices [here](#). Typically, notices will instruct you to do one of the following:

- Return the product where you bought it for a refund.
- Dispose of the product properly so people or animals cannot eat it. This is particularly important if it is open.



**If you think you ate recalled food**, check the recall notice for more details about the product. Recall notices are very specific, and if the food you ate does not exactly match all details in the recall notice (brand, product name, expiration date, lot number, etc.), then it is not part of the recall. If you ate food that was part of the recall, follow the instructions in the recall notice, monitor any potential symptoms, and contact your doctor or a medical professional.

## Who issues a food recall?

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulates meat, poultry, and egg products. All other food products are regulated by the Department of Health and Human Services' Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

When a manufacturer decides on its own to recall a product, it is called a voluntary recall. In other situations, one of the agencies above may request or require a food recall.

## What is being done to keep food safe?

Food safety in the United States involves a range of processes that keep food safe to eat. This includes farm and animal care, production, labeling, packaging, storage, distribution, and communication about foodborne illness. These coordinated efforts help provide quality control in communities across the country, so you can trust the food you purchase will be safe—from production to distribution to consumption. [Learn more about food safety processes in the United States.](#)



### Food Safety During Pregnancy

Pregnant women are more likely to get sick from bacteria in food, which can be dangerous for them and their baby. Risky foods are those that are raw or undercooked, especially meat, eggs, and fish. Other foods that are higher risk for bacteria include raw sprouts, unpasteurized milk and cheeses, and deli meat and hot dogs that have not been thoroughly heated. This is not a complete list. Talk to a healthcare professional for more information or explore [resources from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#).

### Monitoring Outbreaks Before a Recall

A food recall is intended to keep people safe from foodborne illness when the source problem has been identified. In some cases, a public health alert will be issued if a recall cannot or has not taken place. For example, this might happen if the source of the outbreak has not been identified. If you suspect food has made you or someone you know sick, view the list of [current food recall notices and public health alerts in the United States](#) or [file a report](#) of your illness.



## Additional Resources

- For more information about food safety, visit [FoodSafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov).
- View the list of current [food recall notices and public health alerts in the United States](#).
- If you suspect food has made you or someone you know sick, [file a report](#).