

36M lbs. of turkey recalled in salmonella outbreak

4 August 2011, By MARY CLARE JALONICK , Associated Press



Products subject to meat giant Cargill's recall of 36 million pounds of ground turkey linked to a nationwide salmonella outbreak is seen on display at a grocery store in Redwood City, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 3, 2011. Cargill said Wednesday that it is recalling fresh and frozen ground turkey products produced at the company's Springdale, Ark., plant from Feb. 20 through Aug. 2 due to possible contamination from the strain of salmonella linked to the illnesses. The packages were labeled with many different brands, including Honeysuckle White and Kroger. (AP Photo/Paul Sakuma)

(AP) -- Meat giant Cargill is recalling 36 million pounds of turkey after a government hunt for the source of a salmonella outbreak that has killed one person in California and sickened dozens more.

The Agriculture Department and the Minnesota-based company announced Wednesday evening that Cargill is recalling fresh and frozen ground turkey products produced at the company's Springdale, Ark., plant from Feb. 20 through Aug. 2 due to possible contamination from the strain of salmonella linked to 76 illnesses and the one death.

Illnesses in the outbreak date back to March and have been reported in 26 states coast to coast. Both the Agriculture Department and the federal [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) are still working to identify the source. Meanwhile, the Agriculture Department has warned consumers to properly cook ground turkey.

Just before the recall announcement Wednesday, CDC epidemiologist Christopher Braden said he thought health authorities were closing in on the suspect. He said some leftover turkey in a package at a victim's house was confirmed to contain the strain of salmonella linked to the outbreak.

In announcing the recall, Cargill officials said all ground turkey production has been suspended at the Springdale plant until the company is able to determine the source of the contamination.

"Given our concern for what has happened, and our desire to do what is right for our consumers and customers, we are voluntarily removing our ground turkey products from the marketplace," said Steve Willardsen, president of Cargill's turkey processing business.

The Minnesota-based company said it was initiating the recall after its own internal investigation, an Agriculture Department investigation and the information about the illnesses released by the CDC this week.

All of the packages recalled include the code "Est. P-963," according to Cargill. The packages were labeled with many different brands, including Cargill's Honeysuckle White.

According to food safety attorney Bill Marler, who publishes a database of outbreak statistics, the ground turkey recall is one of the largest meat recalls ever.

A chart on the CDC's website shows cases have

occurred every month since early March, with spikes in May and early June. The latest reported cases were in mid-July, although the CDC said some recent cases may not have been reported yet. The CDC said the strain is resistant to many commonly prescribed antibiotics, which can make treatment more difficult.

The states reporting the highest number sickened are Michigan and Ohio, with 10 each. Texas has reported nine illnesses; Illinois, seven; California, six; and Pennsylvania, five.

Twenty states have one to three reported illnesses linked to the outbreak, according to the CDC. They are Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Iowa, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

The CDC estimates that 50 million Americans each year get sick from food poisoning, including about 3,000 who die. Salmonella causes most of these cases, and federal health officials say they've made virtually no progress against it.

Government officials say that even contaminated ground turkey is safe to eat if it is cooked to 165 degrees. But it's also important that raw meat be handled properly before it is cooked and that people wash their hands with soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling the meat. Turkey and other meats should also be properly refrigerated or frozen and leftovers heated.

The most common symptoms of salmonella are diarrhea, abdominal cramps and fever within eight to 72 hours of eating a contaminated product. It can be life-threatening to some with weakened immune systems.

Cargill executive Willardsen said, "Public health and the safety of consumers cannot be compromised."

"It is regrettable that people may have become ill from eating one of our ground turkey products," he said, "and, for anyone who did, we are truly sorry."

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APA citation: 36M lbs. of turkey recalled in salmonella outbreak (2011, August 4) retrieved 9 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-08-36m-lbs-turkey-recalled-salmonella.html>

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