



**DALLAS COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION**

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**DCHHS Announces FDA Updates to Recommendations for Tomato Consumption**

June 15, 2008 (Dallas) – The Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an updated list of recommendations regarding the consumption of tomatoes during an ongoing investigation of an outbreak of relatively rare species of *Salmonella* bacteria known as the Saintpaul strain. Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) is assisting with a multi-state investigation of the outbreak.

“The investigation remains ongoing,” said Zachary Thompson, DCHHS Director. “DCHHS epidemiologists are investigating cases locally, as well as working in partnership with multiple federal, state and local agencies to identify the source of the outbreak.”

To date, there have been 228 cases of the Saintpaul strain of the *Salmonella* bacteria associated with the consumption of raw tomatoes reported nationwide, with 68 cases being reported in Texas. DCHHS has confirmed six cases in Dallas County.

“DCHHS has alerted medical providers, laboratories, and hospitals to be on the lookout for any suspected cases and to notify our offices immediately so that the appropriate laboratory testing and investigations can be done,” said Dr. Wendy Chung, DCHHS Chief Epidemiologist. “Most people infected with *Salmonella* develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection. The illness usually lasts four to seven days, and most persons recover without treatment. Some people may need hospitalization due to severe diarrhea and dehydration. The elderly, infants, and those with impaired immune systems are more likely to have a severe illness.”

Until the exact source of infections is determined, the FDA is recommending that consumers follow the safeguards listed below:

- At this time, consumers should avoid eating or handling raw red plum, raw red Roma, and raw red round tomatoes **unless** they are from regions that have been ruled out as the sources of the contamination. If consumers already have these kinds of tomatoes in their homes and are unsure where they were grown or harvested, they are encouraged to contact the store where they bought the tomatoes. A list of regions that have not been associated with the outbreak can be found at [www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/tomatoes](http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/tomatoes).

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*FDA Recommendations for Tomatoes*

- Raw cherry tomatoes, grape tomatoes, and tomatoes with the vine still attached have **not** been linked to the outbreak in any region, and consumers may continue to buy them. Tomatoes grown at home also are **not** linked to this outbreak. Consumers who are unsure of where the tomatoes are from that they have in their home are encouraged to contact the store or place of purchase for that information.
- If consumers are unable to determine the source of the tomatoes, they should not be eaten.
- Consumers are advised **not** to try to wash raw red plum, red Roma, or raw red round tomatoes that are implicated in the outbreak. Consumers should throw these tomatoes out. *Salmonella* is very hard to wash off.
- Consumers should **not** attempt to cook the tomatoes involved in this outbreak in an effort to kill *Salmonella*. Handling tomatoes contaminated with *Salmonella* can spread the bacterium to anything the handler touches, including hands, kitchen utensils, cutting boards, sinks, and other foods. Cooking tomatoes in the home will **not** ensure that *Salmonella* is eliminated.
- If you purchase tomatoes from a Farmers' market, consumers should ask retailers at farmers' markets what is the sources of their tomatoes. Farmers' markets get their tomatoes from a variety of sources that are not necessarily limited to local farms. These other sources may include the same ones that provided the tomatoes implicated in the *Salmonella* outbreak.
- For tomatoes **not** associated with the outbreak, consumers should follow the usual recommendations:
  - ✓ Don't buy or eat tomatoes that look damaged; for example, if the skin of a tomato is broken or the tomato is spoiled, the tomato should be thrown out.
  - ✓ Stored tomatoes should not come in contact with raw meat, poultry, or eggs.
  - ✓ Wash hands with soap and warm water before handling tomatoes.
  - ✓ Wash each tomato thoroughly under running water. Don't wash tomatoes in a tub or sink filled with water. The FDA does not recommend using any kinds of detergents to wash fresh produce, because it is not yet known if their residues are harmful to humans.
  - ✓ When finished washing a tomato, cut out the scar where the stem was, and throw it away.
  - ✓ Never cut a fresh tomato until it has been thoroughly washed.
  - ✓ Cut the tomato on a clean cutting board, using clean utensils. Don't let the tomato come in contact with other raw foods, including raw meat, poultry, and eggs, or the surfaces they have touched. Wash cutting boards and utensils in between each different type of food that is cut.
  - ✓ Refrigerate fresh, cut tomatoes (or products made from them, such as salsa) at 41° F or less. (Note: Refrigeration will **not** kill *Salmonella*.)
  - ✓ Wash hands with soap and warm water after preparing the tomatoes.

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*FDA Recommendations for Tomatoes*

If you think you may have been exposed to a food borne illness, DCHHS recommends you see your doctor or health care provider in order to rule out *Salmonella* as the cause. The FDA continues to investigate the source of the tomatoes implicated in the *Salmonella* outbreak. The FDA recognizes that the source of these tomatoes may be limited to a single grower or packer in a specific geographic area and is working diligently with the states, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Indian Health Service, local public health agencies, and various food-industry trade associations to quickly determine the source of the tomatoes associated with the outbreak. Further information regarding the multi-state investigation may be found at either of these websites:

<http://www.cdc.gov>

<http://www.fda.gov>

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