

Salmonellosis traced to puffed rice, wheat cereals

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Public health officials warned consumers not to eat certain unsweetened puffed rice and puffed wheat cereals made by the Malt-O-Meal company. The cereal has been identified as the source of an outbreak of salmonellosis, with cases reported in a number of states. These cereals are sold at grocery stores and other outlets throughout the country. The recall does not include the hot porridge that most consumers might associate with the Malt-O-Meal brand. The recalled brands of unsweetened puffed rice and puffed wheat cereals include not only Malt-O-Meal's own label but Acme, America's Choice, Food Club, Giant, Hannaford, Jewel, Laura Lynn, Pathmark, Shaw's, ShopRite, Tops and Weis Quality. Pictures of the cereal packages and lot code details are available on the company's Web site (www.malt-o-meal.com/recallinfo). All of the recalled products are sold in plastic bags. "If you have any of these puffed cereal products, we recommend that you throw them out," said Dr. William E. Keene, an epidemiologist at the Oregon Public Health Division. "Anyone who has eaten these cereals but did not become ill need not take any special action. However, those who currently have severe diarrhea or diarrhea with fever should contact their doctor for advice." The manufacturer has suspended production of the cereals at its Northfield, Minn., plant pending further investigation. Consumers and retailers are encouraged to contact Malt-O-Meal (877-665-9331) for more information about the recall. Malt-O-Meal initiated the recall on April 5, when routine product sampling found Salmonella bacteria in the cereal. Original reports suggested that no one had gotten sick from eating the product. However, as more details emerge, matching cases are being identified in a number of states, mostly in the East. The same factory produced Salmonella-contaminated toasted oat cereal that led to a large national outbreak in 1998. Both outbreaks were caused by the same "serotype" of Salmonella -- Salmonella Agona -- with the same molecular marker. "We haven't seen any recent cases of that type in Oregon," Keene said, "but we want to keep it that way by making sure that consumers here get the warning." Salmonella infections can cause diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramping and sometimes vomiting. Symptoms typically last less than a week, but some individuals, particularly infants, the elderly, and those with immune system disorders are at increased risk for severe illness. Antibiotic therapy is of no value for most patients except those in high-risk categories, and can actually lead persons to carry the bacteria for a longer period of time. Salmonella bacteria are widely distributed among animals and in the environment. Outbreaks have been traced to fruits and vegetables, eggs, meat and poultry, and unpasteurized milk and cheese. Salmonella in food can be killed by thorough cooking, but it can survive undercooking or uneven cooking, as may happen in some microwave ovens.

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