

# NEWS RELEASE



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## **Oregon Public Health officials warn of salmonellosis outbreak linked to frozen meals**

***Marie Callender frozen entrée still found at local grocery stores***

Public health officials repeated today that an outbreak of salmonellosis has been linked to a boxed frozen entrée product manufactured by ConAgra Foods, Inc. under the Marie Callender label. The Cheesy Chicken & Rice item has been identified as the likely source of the outbreak, which has sickened at least 30 people in 15 states. Health officials worry that the entrée has not have been removed from grocery store shelves. Consumers may also still have the product in their freezers.

"We're concerned that people and some retailers may not have gotten this information," said Emilio DeBess, a senior epidemiologist at the Oregon Public Health Division. "This product was sold at grocery stores throughout Oregon and elsewhere. Consumers who have any of the Cheesy Chicken & Rice entrées in their home freezers need to throw them out or return them to the store. Retailers that have this product in their stores need to get them out of circulation immediately.

"Oregon Department of Agriculture inspectors checked in a number of stores on Tuesday and found the recalled product still available in a limited number of stores," DeBess added. "To protect consumers, store managers need to be vigilant about responding to recall notices."

The outbreak was identified when *Salmonella* isolates with the same uncommon serotype, *Salmonella* Chester. This particular molecular pattern began to appear at public health laboratories around the country. Interviews with the people sickened suggested frozen entrées as a common exposure, and follow-up interviews pinpointed the Marie Callender Cheesy Chicken & Rice product.

***(more)***

To date, two cases have been laboratory-confirmed among Oregon residents out of a total of 30 nationally. One of the Oregon cases was hospitalized; both have recovered from their illnesses. No deaths have been reported.

“We are still trying to help ConAgra figure out what caused this outbreak,” DeBess said.

Although the recall covers all lots in the market, Oregon Public Health officials are particularly interested in testing any boxes of Cheesy Chicken & Rice with ‘best if used by’ dates from any time in August 2011. Anyone with boxes containing those date codes should contact the state’s Foodborne Illness Prevention Program at 971-673-1111.

DeBess emphasized that the outbreak has nothing to do with the restaurants and desserts that share the Marie Callender name. ConAgra purchased the rights to the Marie Callender brand name for frozen entrées many years ago, but otherwise these are unrelated businesses.

Salmonellosis is an acute bacterial infection that can cause diarrhea, fever and vomiting. Symptoms usually develop within one to five days after eating contaminated food. Most cases resolve without the need for medical attention, and antibiotics are not advised for most persons with uncomplicated illness. People who have eaten Marie Callender frozen entrées and who are still experiencing symptoms should discuss this exposure with their doctor. Some people with salmonellosis develop serious illness that can lead to hospitalization and, rarely, death.

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[See Page 3 for product photo.]