

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **FDA Warns Consumers in New Mexico and Texas Not to Eat Certain Types of Raw Red Tomatoes**

The Food and Drug Administration is alerting consumers in New Mexico and Texas that a salmonellosis outbreak appears to be linked to consumption of certain types of raw red tomatoes and products containing raw red tomatoes. The bacteria causing the illnesses are *Salmonella* serotype Saintpaul, an uncommon type of *Salmonella*.

The specific type and source of tomatoes are under investigation. However, preliminary data suggest that raw red plum, red Roma, or round red tomatoes are the cause. At this time, consumers in New Mexico and Texas should limit their tomato consumption to tomatoes that have not been implicated in the outbreak. These include cherry tomatoes, grape tomatoes, tomatoes sold with the vine still attached, and tomatoes grown at home.

*Salmonella* can cause serious and sometimes fatal infections particularly in young children, frail or elderly people, and those with weakened immune systems. Healthy persons often experience fever, diarrhea (which may be bloody), nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain. In rare circumstances, the organism can get into the bloodstream and produce more severe illnesses. Consumers in New Mexico and Texas who have recently eaten raw tomatoes or foods containing raw tomatoes and are experiencing any of these symptoms should contact their health care provider. All *Salmonella* infections should be reported to state or local health authorities.

From April 23 through June 1, 2008, there have been 57 reported cases of salmonellosis caused by *Salmonella* Saintpaul in New Mexico and Texas, including 17 hospitalizations. Approximately 30 reports of illness in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, and Utah are currently being investigated to determine whether they are also linked to tomatoes. There are no reported deaths.

FDA recognizes that the source of the contaminated tomatoes may be limited to a single grower or packer or tomatoes from a specific geographic area. FDA also recognizes that there are many tomato crops across the country and in foreign countries that are just becoming ready for harvest or will become ready in the coming months. In order to ensure that consumers can continue to enjoy tomatoes that are safe to eat, FDA is working diligently with the states, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Indian Health Service, and various food industry trade associations to quickly determine the source and type of the contaminated tomatoes. As more information becomes available, FDA will update this warning.

Last year FDA began a multi-year Tomato Safety Initiative to reduce the incidence of tomato-related foodborne illness. The Initiative is a collaborative effort between FDA and the state health and agriculture departments in Virginia and Florida, in cooperation with several universities and members of the produce industry.

A key element of the Food Protection Plan -- a scientific and a risk-based approach to strengthen and protect the nation's food supply -- is prevention. FDA encourages producers to critically reexamine their operations and apply the scientific principles and regulations established decades ago to provide a safe product for the consumer.

Information on safe handling of produce can be found at [www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/prodsafe.html](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/prodsafe.html).

Tomato consumer page can be found at <http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/tomatoes.html>

Updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/>