

Listeria Outbreak Linked to Queso Fresco and Cotija Cheese

Food Safety Alert

Posted February 13, 2024

Fast Facts

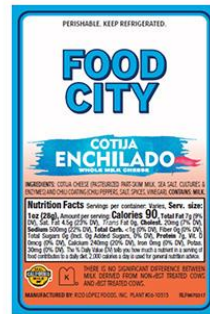
- Illnesses: 26
- Hospitalizations: 23
- Deaths: 2
- [States](#): 11
- Recall: Yes
- Investigation status: Active (first posted on February 6, 2024)



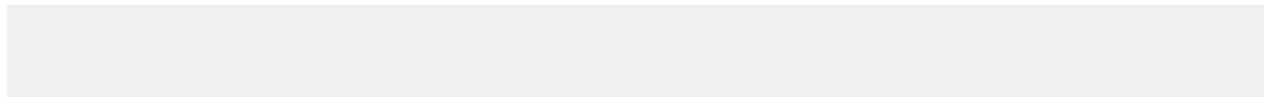
Some of the recalled foods.



Queso fresco



Some of the recalled cheeses.



Recalled Food

Cheeses, crema, and yogurt made by Rizo-López Foods

- Types of cheeses include:
 - Blanco suave
 - Cotija
 - Oaxaca
 - Panela
 - Queso crema
 - Queso fresco
 - Queso para freir
 - Queso seco
 - Requeson
 - Ricotta
- Sold nationwide under many brand names
- See [FDA's website](#) for the full list of recalled products

Foods containing recalled cheese, crema, or yogurt

- Types of food include:
 - Salads and salad kits
 - Tacos and taco kits
 - Burritos
 - Enchiladas
 - Sandwiches
 - Dressings, sauces, and dips
 - And more
- Many different brands and stores
- See [FDA's website](#) and [FSIS's website](#) for the full list of recalled products

What You Should Do

- **Do not eat any recalled products.**
 - Throw them away or return them to where you bought them.
- **Clean the refrigerator, containers, and surfaces** that may have touched the recalled products.
 - *Listeria* can survive in the refrigerator and can easily spread to other foods and surfaces.

- **Call a healthcare provider right away** if you have these symptoms after eating recalled products:
 - **Pregnant people** usually have fever, muscle aches, and tiredness.
 - **People who are not pregnant** usually have fever, muscle aches, and tiredness. They may also get a headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or seizures.

What Businesses Should Do

- Do not sell or serve recalled products.
- Follow [FDA's safe handling and cleaning advice](#) if you sold or served recalled products.

Listeria Symptoms

- *Listeria* is especially harmful to people who are pregnant, aged 65 or older, or have weakened immune systems. This is because *Listeria* is more likely to spread beyond their gut to other parts of their body, resulting in a severe condition known as invasive listeriosis.
 - **For people who are pregnant**, *Listeria* can cause pregnancy loss, premature birth, or a life-threatening infection in their newborn.
 - **For people who are 65 years or older or who have a weakened immune system**, *Listeria* often results in hospitalization and sometimes death.
- Symptoms usually start within 2 weeks after eating food contaminated with *Listeria*, but may start as early as the same day or as late as 10 weeks after.
 - **Pregnant people** usually have fever, muscle aches, and tiredness.
 - **People who are not pregnant** usually have fever, muscle aches, and tiredness. They may also get a headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or seizures.

Investigation Details

Posted February 6, 2024

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CDC, public health and regulatory officials in several states, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are collecting [different types of data](#) to investigate a multistate outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* infections.

CDC investigated this outbreak in 2017 and 2021. Epidemiologic evidence in previous investigations identified queso fresco and other similar cheeses as a potential source of the outbreak, but there was not enough information to identify a specific brand. CDC reopened the investigation in January 2024 after new illnesses were reported in December 2023 and the outbreak strain was found in a cheese sample from Rizo-López Foods.

Epidemiology and recent laboratory data show that queso fresco and cotija made by Rizo-López Foods are making people in this outbreak sick.

Epidemiologic Data

As of February 6, 2024, a total of 26 people infected with the outbreak strain of *Listeria* have been reported from 11 states (see [map](#)). Illnesses started on dates ranging from June 15, 2014, to December 10, 2023 (see [timeline](#)). Of 26 people with information available, 23 have been hospitalized. Two deaths have been reported, one from California and one from Texas.

Among people who are pregnant, *Listeria* can cause pregnancy loss, premature birth, or a life-threatening infection in their newborn. In this outbreak, two people got sick during their pregnancy and one person had a pregnancy loss. There are also two newborns in the case count for this outbreak because *Listeria* can be passed to newborns during pregnancy.

The true number of sick people in this outbreak is likely higher than the number reported, and the outbreak may not be limited to the states with known illnesses. This is because some people recover without medical care and are not tested for *Listeria*. In addition, recent illnesses may not yet be reported as it usually takes [3 to 4 weeks](#) to determine if a sick person is part of an outbreak.

Public health officials collect many different types of information from sick people, including their age, race, ethnicity, other demographics, and the

foods they ate in the month before they got sick. This information provides clues to help investigators identify the source of the outbreak.

The table below has information about sick people in this outbreak (“n” is the number of people with information available for each demographic).

Table of demographic information (n is the number of people with information available)

Demographics	Information
Age (n=26)	Range from <1 to 88 years Median age of 52
Sex (n=26)	58% female 42% male
Race (n=21)	71% White 5% Native American or Alaska Native 24% reported another race category
Ethnicity (n=26)	85% Hispanic 15% non-Hispanic

State and local public health officials are interviewing people about the foods they ate in the month before they got sick. Of the 22 people interviewed, 16 (73%) reported eating queso fresco, cotija, or other similar cheeses. Among people who remembered specific brands, three people who got sick between 2014 and 2022 reported Don Francisco brand queso fresco or cotija. Don Francisco is one of the brands of recalled cheeses.

Laboratory Data

Public health investigators are using the [PulseNet](#) system to identify illnesses that may be part of this outbreak. CDC PulseNet manages a national database of DNA fingerprints of bacteria that cause foodborne illnesses. DNA fingerprinting is performed on bacteria using a method called [whole genome sequencing \(WGS\)](#).

WGS showed that bacteria from sick people’s samples from 2014 to present are closely related genetically. This suggests that people in this outbreak got sick from the same food.

In January 2024, the Hawaii State Department of Health's Food and Drug Branch collected a sample of aged cotija cheese product made by Rizo-López Foods during routine sampling. Testing identified the outbreak strain of *Listeria* in the product.

FDA conducted inspections at the Rizo-López Foods facility and collected food and environmental samples for testing. FDA found the outbreak strain of *Listeria* on a container where cheeses are kept before they are packaged.

Public Health Actions

On January 11, 2024, Rizo-López Foods, Inc. [recalled](#) the aged cotija cheese product after Hawaii state officials found *Listeria* in it.

On February 6, 2024, Rizo-López Foods, Inc. [recalled](#) all cheese and other dairy products made in their facility. They have also temporarily stopped producing and distributing these products while their investigation is ongoing.

Do not eat, sell, or serve any recalled products.