

[Home](#) [Food](#) [Food Safety](#) [CORE Network](#)

## Food

### Investigation of a Multistate Outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* Infections Due to Imported Marte Brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata Cheese

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On this page:

- [What is the Problem?](#)
- [Where was the Cheese Distributed?](#)
- [What is Being Done About the Problem?](#)
- [What are the Symptoms of Listeriosis?](#)
- [Who is at Risk?](#)
- [What Do Consumers Need To Do?](#)
- [What Do Retailers Need To Do?](#)
- [Who Should be Contacted?](#)
- [Investigation Progression](#)

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*The U.S. Food and Drug Administration along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state and local officials are investigating a multi-state outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* infections. We are moving quickly to learn as much as possible and prevent additional people from becoming ill. We recognize that people will be concerned about this outbreak, and we will continue to provide updates and advice.*

#### What is the Problem?

The FDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state and local public health officials are investigating a multi-state outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* infections linked to imported Marte brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata cheese distributed by Forever Cheese Inc. of Long Island City, New York.

The FDA has placed the maker of the recalled cheese, [Fattorie Chiarappa S.R.L. of Conversano, Italy](#), on [Import Alert](#)<sup>1</sup>. This means that Fattorie Chiarappa cheese will be denied admission into the United States unless the importer shows that the cheese is not contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*, such as by using private laboratories to test the cheese.

Forever Cheese had initially initiated a voluntary recall of this cheese the lot number (T9425) and/ or a production code (441202). This cheese may also have been referred to as Ricotta Frescolina Marte Tipo Toscanella and/or Ricotta Salata Soft Lot (T9425) as it was being distributed.

Subsequently, Forever Cheese expanded the original recall to include all lots and all production codes of Marte Brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata cheese. Forever Cheese has also ceased importing cheeses from Fattorie Chiarappa S.R.L., and has recalled Marte brand Roasted Ricotta and Hard Ricotta Salata, as well.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports a total of 15 people infected with the outbreak strain of *Listeria monocytogenes* from 12 states and the District of Columbia. Nationwide, 15 persons have been hospitalized. Three deaths have been reported. The [CDC](#)<sup>2</sup> says that listeriosis contributed to at least one of those deaths.

The investigation into this outbreak continues, in order to determine whether there are other possible sources of the outbreak.

#### Where was the Cheese Distributed?

The Marte Brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata cheese was sold to supermarkets, restaurants, and wholesale distributors in California, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington between June 20 and August 9,

2012.

Many people who consumed the cheese may not know where it came from because it was distributed in large wheels to retailers or restaurants to break down into smaller servings or packages. Ricotta salata is a salty, white cheese made from pasteurized sheep's milk. It is NOT the same as soft ricotta cheese sold in tubs and frequently used to make lasagna.

[back to top](#)

#### **What is Being Done About the Problem?**

The FDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and state and local public health officials are investigating a multi-state outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* infections linked to imported Marte Brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata cheese distributed by Forever Cheese Inc. of Long Island City, New York.

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#### **What are the Symptoms of Listeriosis?**

Listeriosis is a rare and serious illness caused by eating food contaminated with bacteria called *Listeria*. Persons who think they might have become ill should consult their doctor. A person with listeriosis usually has fever and muscle aches.

[back to top](#)

#### **Who is at Risk?**

Listeriosis can be fatal, especially in certain high-risk groups. These groups include older adults, people with compromised immune systems and certain chronic medical conditions (such as cancer), unborn babies and newborns. In pregnant women, listeriosis can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, and serious illness or death in newborn babies, though the mother herself rarely becomes seriously ill.

#### **What Do Consumers Need To Do?**

Consumers should not eat imported Marte Brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata cheese. If you believe that you have purchased any of this cheese please contact your distributor or retailer for a full refund.

*Listeria* can grow at refrigerator temperatures, about 40 degrees Fahrenheit (4 degrees Celsius). The longer ready-to-eat refrigerated foods are stored in the refrigerator, the more opportunity *Listeria* has to grow.

It is very important that consumers clean their refrigerators and other food preparation surfaces and cheese cutting utensils thoroughly that may have come in contact with the contaminated cheese. Consumers should follow these simple steps:

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Wash the inside walls and shelves of the refrigerator, cutting boards and countertops; then sanitize them with a solution of one tablespoon of chlorine bleach to one gallon of hot water; dry with a clean cloth or paper towel that has not been previously used.
- Wipe up spills in the refrigerator immediately and clean the refrigerator regularly.
- Always wash hands with warm water and soap following the cleaning and sanitization process.

[back to top](#)

#### **What Do Retailers Need To Do?**

**Contaminated cheese may still be in stores and restaurants.**

Retailers who have cut and packaged this cheese need to be concerned about cross contamination of cutting surfaces and utensils through contact with imported Marte Brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata .

*Listeria* can grow in cut cheese at room and refrigerator temperatures. *Listeria* can also spread to other cheeses cut and served on the same cutting board or stored in the same area.

Do not sell or serve recalled Marte Brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata cheese distributed by Forever Cheese, Inc. If you do not know the source of your ricotta salata cheese, check with your supplier.

- **Dispose of recalled cheese.**
- **Wash and sanitize cheese display cases and refrigerators** where contaminated cheese was stored.
- **Wash and sanitize cutting boards, surfaces, and utensils** used to cut, serve, or store contaminated cheese.
- **Wash hands** with warm water and soap following the cleaning and sanitation process.

[back to top](#)

#### Who Should be Contacted?

If you have any questions please call Forever Cheese (888) 930-8693, contact: Jeff DiMeo from 9 am to 5pm EST and mention Recall.

Consumers who show any signs of illness from listeriosis should consult their health care provider. The FDA encourages consumers with questions about food safety to call 1-888-SAFEFOOD or consult the [fda.gov](http://fda.gov) website.

#### Investigation Progression

FDA will update the public on the progress of this investigation as more information becomes available.

*The information in this release reflects the FDA's best efforts to communicate what it has learned from the manufacturer and the state and local public health agencies involved in the investigation. The agency will update this page as more information becomes available.*

For more information:

- [CDC: Multistate Outbreak of Listeriosis Linked to Imported Frescolina Brand Ricotta Salata Cheese](#)<sup>4 5</sup>
- [FoodSafety.gov on Listeria](#)<sup>6</sup>

[back to top](#)

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**Links on this page:**

1. [http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/CMS\\_IA/importalert\\_9.html](http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/CMS_IA/importalert_9.html)
2. <http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/cheese-09-12/>
3. [http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/CMS\\_IA/importalert\\_9.html](http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/CMS_IA/importalert_9.html)
4. <http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/cheese-09-12/>
5. <http://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/AboutThisWebsite/WebsitePolicies/Disclaimers/default.htm>
6. <http://www.foodsafety.gov/poisoning/causes/bacteriaviruses/listeria/index.html>