

# Salmonella on Cantaloupe — Important Questions and Answers

On August 22 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced a recall of cantaloupe grown at Chamberlain Farms in Owensville, Indiana. The recall was issued because cantaloupes from that farm may be contaminated with Salmonella associated with a multi-state outbreak. People are advised not to eat cantaloupe grown on Chamberlain Farms. Many illnesses and at least two deaths are linked to this outbreak. The outbreak of Salmonella on cantaloupe was first announced on August 17. Chamberlain Farms had already voluntarily recalled their product at that time. At this time, consumers can continue to purchase and eat cantaloupes that did not originate from Chamberlain Farms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to work with the FDA and health officials in the affected states to investigate the outbreak to determine if there are additional sources.

Here are some important questions about the issue and answers from Purdue Extension specialists. Information here is current at the time of publication, but it may change as the investigation continues.

**Q:** *What is Salmonella?*

**A:** Salmonella is a group of bacteria and is one of the most common causes of foodborne illness. There are more than 2,500 kinds (or serotypes) of Salmonella. The serotype causing this outbreak is Salmonella Typhimurium. Cooking and pasteurization kill Salmonella. Since cantaloupe is seldom cooked, this outbreak is of particular concern.

## **References**

[FoodSafety.gov](http://FoodSafety.gov) — Salmonella

*Bad Bug Book*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

**Q:** *Where did the Salmonella come from? How did it get on the cantaloupes?*

**A:** While it isn't yet clear how the Salmonella got on the affected cantaloupes, there are some basic things we do know about how Salmonella can get on produce. Salmonella is common in the environment. The bacteria can live in the digestive tracts of several animals, including humans, wild animals, livestock, and pets. Salmonella also is commonly found in feces of wild and domestic birds, and often associated with reptiles and amphibians. Salmonella can be found in soil and water sources (such as streams, rivers, and ponds). A cantaloupe could become contaminated in the field if it came in contact with animal feces or soil, or it could be contaminated during or after harvest through contact with a person, equipment, or water that was contaminated with

Salmonella. Good agricultural and sanitation practices (such as applying manure fertilizer long before crops are planted, ensuring all employees wash hands, using clean water for irrigation, and washing produce) can minimize the possibility of contamination.

### References

[FoodSafety.gov — Salmonella](#)

[CDC — Salmonella](#)

**Q:** *How do I know if a cantaloupe is from Chamberlain Farms?*

**A:** Ask your retailer or wholesale distributor if the cantaloupe came from Chamberlain Farms. If it did, do not eat the cantaloupe and do not feed it to animals. Put the cantaloupe in a plastic bag and put it in a sealed trashcan so that animals cannot eat it. More information is available from the [CDC](#).

**Q:** *I have a cantaloupe that isn't from Chamberlain Farms. What should I do with it?*

**A:** Cantaloupes from other farms have not been recalled. Follow [recommended practices](#) for washing, handling, and storing cantaloupe before eating it. As with any fresh produce, cut away any damaged or bruised areas, and wash cantaloupe thoroughly under running water before eating or cutting. Washing with soap or detergent or using commercial produce washes is not recommended. Although you will remove the rind before eating, it is still important to wash it first so dirt and bacteria aren't transferred from the knife onto the flesh of the melon. Scrub the rind with a clean produce brush before cutting. Dry the cantaloupe with a clean cloth towel or paper towel to further reduce bacteria that may be present.

### Reference

[FDA — Raw Produce: Selecting and Serving it Safely](#)

**Q:** *Is the cantaloupe I bought from my local farmers market safe to eat?*

**A:** When you purchase cantaloupe from a farmers market, fruit stand, or other outlet, ask the vendor where the cantaloupe came from. Unless the cantaloupe was grown on the farm involved in the recall (Chamberlain Farms) there is no particular concern. You should also follow [recommended practices](#) for washing, handling, and storing cantaloupe before eating it.

**Q:** *What are the symptoms of infection with Salmonella?*

**A:** People infected with Salmonella usually develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps between 12 hours and three days after exposure. Young children, the elderly, and individuals with compromised immune systems are particularly vulnerable to severe illness. The disease caused by Salmonella is called salmonellosis.

### Resource

[CDC — What is Salmonellosis?](#)

**Q:** *What's the difference between a cantaloupe and a muskmelon?*

**A:** The terms “cantaloupe” and “muskmelon” are often interchangeable. Both terms refer to netted melons with orange or green flesh. The USDA and FDA use the term cantaloupe.

**Q:** *How can I stay informed about this outbreak?*

**A:** More information about the outbreak is available from the [FDA](#) and [CDC](#).

---

It is the policy of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service that all persons have equal opportunity and access to its educational programs, services, activities, and facilities without regard to race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, disability or status as a veteran.

Purdue University is an Affirmative Action institution. This material may be available in alternative formats.