

China govt under fire over new food bacteria rule

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China's state-run media and web users criticised the government Friday after it ruled that small amounts of a potentially lethal bacterium were permissible in frozen food.

The [health ministry](#) ruling followed a series of recalls of products, including dumplings made by Synear Food -- one of China's largest frozen [food producers](#) -- because they contained traces of staphylococcus aureus bacterium.

The bacterium, also known as golden staph, can cause a range of mild to severe infections and diseases, including life-threatening pneumonia and meningitis.

Under the existing rules, food products must be recalled if any of the bacteria are discovered. But new rules announced Thursday will allow a small amount of staphylococcus aureus in frozen rice or dough products.

A commentary in the People's Daily, the Communist Party mouthpiece, urged authorities to "address public anxiety" after the revision, which follows a series of food safety scandals in China.

"Authorities cannot attempt to fudge [public concerns](#) over food safety," said the article, written by Jiang Yun.

"In order to rebuild the credibility of food safety standards, they should... consider whether the making of the standards is open and

transparent."

Chinese Internet users went further, accusing authorities of deliberately lowering food safety standards to pander to big business.

"According to the new standard, ... toxin is allowed in foods as long as the amount is not to the lethal level," wrote one blogger under the name Tianxiaqimou.

China's food industry remains plagued by safety scandals, despite sporadic government crackdowns.

One of the biggest emerged in 2008 when huge amounts of the industrial chemical melamine were found to have been illegally added to [dairy products](#) to give the appearance of higher [protein content](#).

In September last year, authorities including China's top court and the public security ministry called for tougher penalties, including the death sentence in serious food safety cases.

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