

# Dairy CEO: Infant formula botulism scare is over

August 7 2013

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A Sri Lankan boy stands near a Fonterra product, which is still displayed for sale in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Tuesday, Aug. 6, 2013. Fonterra, the world's largest dairy exporter, announced Saturday that hundreds of tons of infant formula, sports drinks and other products sold in seven countries could be tainted. On Tuesday, Sri Lanka's health ministry said it had ordered all milk products imported from New Zealand be stopped at ports and the withdrawal of products with whey protein from supermarkets as a precaution after reports of contamination that could cause botulism. (AP Photo/Eranga Jayawardena)

The chief executive of New Zealand dairy giant Fonterra said Wednesday the risk that people could contract botulism from infant formula made with the company's whey concentrate has ended.

Speaking at a press conference in Auckland on Wednesday, Theo Spierings said that all supplies of potentially contaminated infant formula had been removed from the international market. He said there was almost no more risk for consumers.

"I apologize for the discomfort and anxiety and distress this has caused," he said.

The chief executive of the world's largest dairy exporter returned from key market China this week where he'd been doing [damage control](#).

He said 18 metric tons of potentially contaminated whey protein concentrate had been turned into 2,300 tons of infant formula that had now been successfully contained in warehouses or recalled.

Fonterra announced Saturday that hundreds of tons of infant formula, [sports drinks](#) and other products sold in seven countries could be tainted after tests found bacteria in whey protein concentrate that can cause botulism. Recalls were limited to the infant formula after beverage makers explained their [manufacturing processes](#) would have killed any bacteria.

Spierings said the contamination occurred as the result of dirty pipes at a Fonterra factory in New Zealand's Waikato farming district in May 2012. He said samples turned up a potential bacteria problem in March this year, but that it took until July 31 for testing to indicate the presence of the [strain of bacteria](#) that could cause botulism.

The scare has damaged New Zealand's reputation as a supplier of safe,

high quality food.

Consumers in China and elsewhere have been willing to pay a premium for New Zealand infant formula because of high [food safety standards](#) and the popular image of the country as a remote, unspoiled environment. Chinese consumers have a special interest after tainted local milk formula killed six babies in 2008.

The [botulism](#) scare prompted China to stop importing New Zealand's whey-based dairy products, according to Fonterra officials. Russia and Sri Lanka also announced import halts on certain New Zealand dairy products. It wasn't immediately clear Wednesday if or when those bans might be lifted.

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