

FDA: Three people die from foodborne illness linked to ice cream

March 13 2015, byTerry Wallace

The deaths of three people who developed a foodborne illness linked to some Blue Bell ice cream products has prompted the Texas icon's first product recall in its 108-year history.

Five people, in all, developed listeriosis in Kansas after eating [products](#) from one production line at the Blue Bell creamery in Brenham, Texas, according to a statement Friday from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The FDA says [listeria bacteria](#) were found in samples of Blue Bell Chocolate Chip Country Cookies, Great Divide Bars, Sour Pop Green Apple Bars, Cotton Candy Bars, Scoops, Vanilla Stick Slices, Almond Bars and No Sugar Added Moo Bars.

Blue Bell says its regular Moo Bars were untainted, as were its half gallons, quarts, pints, cups, three-gallon [ice cream](#) and take-home frozen snack novelties.

There appeared to be some uncertainty as to where the patients acquired the listeria bacterial infection.

According to a Friday statement from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, all five of the people sickened were hospitalized at the same Kansas hospital for unrelated health issues before developing listeriosis, "a finding that strongly suggests their infections (with listeria bacteria) were acquired in the hospital," the CDC said. The statement

does not identify the hospital.

Of those five, information was available from four on what foods they had eaten in the month before the infection. All four had consumed milkshakes made with a single-serving Blue Bell ice cream product called "Scoops" while they were in the hospital, the CDC said.

"Scoops," as well as the other suspect Blue Bell items, are mostly food service items and not produced for retail, said Paul Cruse, CEO of the Brenham creamery.

The CDC said the listeria isolated from specimens taken from four of the five Kansas patients matched strains isolated from Blue Bell products obtained this year in South Carolina and Texas.

Blue Bell handles all of its own distribution and customer service, Cruse said, so it moved to pull suspect products from shelves, most of them institutional, as soon as it was alerted to the South Carolina contamination Feb. 13. Cruse did not suspect handling of those products after they left the Central Texas creamery.

"The only time it can be contaminated is at the time of production," he said. That contamination has been traced to a machine that extrudes the ice cream into forms and onto cookies, and that machine remains off line, he said.

All products now on store and institution shelves are safe and wholesome, Cruse said.

However, "Contaminated ice cream products may still be in the freezers of consumers, institutions, and retailers, given that these products can have a shelf life of up to 2 years," the CDC statement said. CDC recommends that consumers do not eat products that Blue Bell

Creameries removed from the market, and institutions and retailers should not serve or sell them.

Listeriosis is a life-threatening infection caused by eating food contaminated with bacteria called *Listeria monocytogenes*, the CDC said. The disease primarily affects pregnant women and their newborns, older adults, and people with immune systems weakened by cancer, cancer treatments, or other serious conditions (like diabetes, kidney failure, liver disease, and HIV). Rarely, people without these risk factors are affected.

A person with listeriosis usually has fever and muscle aches, sometimes preceded by diarrhea or other gastrointestinal symptoms. Almost everyone who is diagnosed with listeriosis has invasive infection, meaning the bacteria spread from their intestines to the blood, causing bloodstream infection, or to the central nervous system, causing meningitis. Although people can sometimes develop listeriosis up to 2 months after eating contaminated food, symptoms usually start within several days. Listeriosis is treated with antibiotics, the CDC said.

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