

Three Kansas hospital patients die of ice cream-related illness

March 14 2015, by Terry Wallace And Nicholas Clayton



This photo shows a container of Blue Bell ice cream Friday, March 13, 2015, in Dallas. 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. (AP Photo/Kim Johnson Flodin)

The deaths of three people who developed a foodborne illness linked to some Blue Bell ice cream products have 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.

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

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 in the hospital, the CDC said.



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

The CDC said the listeria isolated from specimens taken from four of the five patients at Via Christi St. Francis hospital in Wichita, Kansas, matched strains from Blue Bell products obtained this year in South Carolina and Texas.

The five patients became ill with listeriosis during their hospitalizations for unrelated causes between December 2013 and January 2015, said hospital spokeswoman Maria Loving.

"Via Christi was not aware of any listeria contamination in the Blue Bell Creameries ice cream products and immediately removed all Blue Bell Creameries products from all Via Christi locations once the potential contamination was discovered," Loving said in a statement Friday to The Associated Press.

Via Christi has eight hospitals in Kansas and Oklahoma.

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



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"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, Kruse 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.

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 two months after eating contaminated food, symptoms usually start within several days. Listeriosis is treated with antibiotics, the CDC said.

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