

Company pulls spicy One Chip Challenge from store shelves as Massachusetts investigates teen's death

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A package of Paqui OneChipChallenge spicy tortilla chips is seen on Thursday, Sept. 7, 2023, in Boston. Authorities are raising the alarm about a OneChipChallenge social media trend that encourages people to avoid seeking relief from eating and drinking for as long as possible after eating the chips, days after a Massachusetts teenager died hours after taking part in the challenge. The dare is popular on social media sites, with scores of people including children unwrapping the packaging, eating the chips and reacting to the heat. Credit: AP Photo/Steve LeBlanc

The maker of an extremely spicy tortilla chip sold as the One Chip Challenge and popularized as a dare on social media is pulling the product after the family of a Massachusetts teenager blamed the stunt for his death.

The cause of Harris Wolobah's death last Friday hasn't been determined and an autopsy was still pending as of Thursday, but the 14-year-old's family blames the [challenge](#). Since his death, the Texas-based manufacturer, Paqui, has asked retailers to stop selling the individually wrapped chips—a step 7-Eleven has already taken.

The One Chip Challenge chip sells for about \$10 and comes wrapped in a sealed foil pouch that is enclosed in a coffin-shaped cardboard box. The package warns that the chip is made for the "vengeful pleasure of intense heat and pain," is intended for adults and should be kept out of reach of children.

Paqui, a subsidiary of The Hershey Company, said in a statement posted on its website Thursday that it was "deeply saddened by the death" of Wolobah.

"We have seen an increase in teens and other individuals not heeding these warnings," the company said. "As a result, while the product

continues to adhere to [food safety standards](#), out of abundance of caution, we are actively working with retailers to remove the product from shelves."

Authorities in Massachusetts have also responded to the death by warning parents about the challenge, which is popular on [social media](#) sites such as TikTok. Scores of people, including children, post videos of themselves unwrapping the packaging, eating the spicy chips and then reacting to the heat. Some videos show people gagging, coughing and begging for water.



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"We urge parents to discuss this with their children and advise them not to partake in this activity," Worcester County District Attorney Joseph Early said in a series of posts about the challenge on the social network X, formerly known as Twitter. "The company warnings state the chips are intended for adult consumption. Other states across the country have seen hospitalizations due to the chip challenge, including teens."

There have been reports from around the country of people who have gotten sick after taking part in the challenge, including three students from a California [high school](#) who were sent to a hospital. And paramedics were called to a Minnesota school last year when seven students fell ill after taking part in the challenge.

"You can have very [mild symptoms](#) like burning or tingling of the lips in the mouth, but you can also have more [severe symptoms](#)," said Dr. Lauren Rice, the chief of pediatric emergency medicine at Tufts Medical Center in Boston, noting that this is an opportunity for parents, coaches, teachers to learn about the various social media challenges that are out there and could pose dangers.

"This goes back to the ingredients that are used with the tortilla chip," she continued. "There are some spices like capsaicin, which is a chemical ingredient that we use in things like pepper spray and so they are very strong chemicals and they can be very irritating. Some of the more severe symptoms that we see can be things like significant abdominal pain or nausea and vomiting."

Dr. Peter Chai, an associate professor of emergency medicine and medical toxicology at Brigham and Women's Hospital, said these chips can be dangerous under certain circumstances.

"It's possible eating these chips with high concentration of capsaicin could cause death," he said. "It would really depend on the amount of

capsaicin that an individual was exposed to. At high doses, it can lead to fatal dysrhythmia or irreversible injury to the heart."



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Police in Worcester, which is in central Massachusetts and is the state's second-largest city, said in a statement that they were called to Wolobah's house Friday afternoon and found him "unresponsive and not breathing." He was transported to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Family and friends of Wolobah believe the chips caused his death, and his family called for the chips to be banned from store shelves.

"The chip is responsible in our eyes for whatever took place because he was a healthy kid," said Douglas Hill, who runs the basketball league Wolobah played in and described him as a quiet teen whose family came to the U.S. from Liberia.

"The conversation now is about the chip, but there will be other challenges coming and we want to make sure children know they shouldn't be participating in anything that could put them in harm's way," said Douglas, who organized a basketball event Saturday to honor the teen. A Friday vigil is also planned.

There can be no doubt about why someone would eat these chips.

In addition to its name, One Chip Challenge, the package lays out the "rules for the challenge," which encourages the buyer to eat the entire chip, "wait as long as possible before drinking or eating anything," and

post their reaction on social media. The packaging also asks how long can the individual last on a scale from one minute to one hour.

The back of the package warns buyers not to eat the chip if they are "sensitive to spicy foods, allergic to peppers, night shades or capsaicin or are pregnant or have any medical conditions." It also said individuals should wash their hands after touching the chip and "seek medical assistance should you experience difficulty breathing, fainting or extended nausea."

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