



FROM: FDA's Retail Food Protection Program, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
TO: Food Service and Retail Food Store Industry

SUBJECT: Advice to Food Establishments that Sell or Repackage Cheese Products

A recent multi-state outbreak of *Listeriosis* has been associated with consumption of imported Marte brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata cheese and with possible consumption of other cheeses that may have been cross-contaminated by the ricotta salata at retail locations. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is reminding retail and food service operations to remove all cheeses subject to the Forever Cheese Inc. (Long Island City, New York) recalls on 9/10/12 and 9/14/12 of their Marte brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata, cheese. This cheese is a product of Italy.

Listeria bacteria can grow in cut cheese that is held at room temperature and cut cheese that is held at refrigerated temperatures. *Listeria monocytogenes* can also spread to other cheeses that are cut, served, or stored on the same surface as contaminated cheese.

For these reasons, FDA recommends that retailers and restaurants **not** serve, cut and repackage, or sell recalled Marte brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata cheese distributed by Forever Cheese, Inc. If you have this cheese from Forever Cheese, Inc. onsite, follow the instructions as stated in their recall; if the source of your ricotta salata cheese is unknown, check with your supplier.

Cheeses have previously been linked to foodborne diseases caused by *Listeria*, *Salmonella*, and *E coli* O157: H7, therefore, routine food safety measures, such as those recommended in the FDA Food Code, should be taken to prevent cross-contamination of other cheese or other foods. Retail stores and restaurants are required to clean and sanitize food contact surfaces and equipment throughout the day. This includes equipment and utensils in direct contact with cheese, such as cutting boards and tables, cheese slicers, knives, display and service cases, food containers and display trays. Because *Listeria monocytogenes* may also harbor in unexpected places such as exposed floor drains, drain baskets, and on floors within the food preparation area, these surfaces be routinely cleaned and sanitized to prevent cross-contamination. Finally, food employees should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water, especially before handling food.

Since March 2012, 18 people have been made ill as part of a multi-state outbreak of listeriosis being investigated by the US Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state and local health agencies. This outbreak has been linked to Marte brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata cheese distributed by Forever Cheese, Inc. The following states have had laboratory confirmed *Listeria monocytogenes* illness cases: California (1), Colorado (1), District of Columbia (1), Maryland (3), Minnesota (1), Nebraska (1), New Jersey (3), New Mexico (1), New York (1), Ohio (1), Pennsylvania (2), Virginia (1) and Washington (1).

- Forever Cheese recently initiated two voluntary recalls. The recall issued on 9/10/12 identifies Marte brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata cheese with a lot number (T9425) and/ or a production code (441202). However, this particular lot of cheese was only in distribution from 6/20/12 to 8/9/12, which does not include the span of all related illnesses. The recall issued on 9/14/12, requested customers to destroy all lots of Marte

brand Frescolina Ricotta Salata. In addition, this press release stated that all cheeses produced by Fattorie Chiarappa are subject to a market withdrawal, and are being removed from distribution channels. This includes the Roasted Ricotta Salata and Marte brand Hard Ricotta Salata cheese.

- US Food and Drug Administration officials are continuing to investigate the outbreak.
- For additional information, please see the following:
 - <http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/CORENetwork/ucm319197.htm>
 - <http://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/ucm318844.htm>
 - <http://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/ucm320370.htm>
 - FDA Food Code: <http://www.fda.gov/FoodCode>
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/cheese-09-12/index.html>

If you have any further questions, please email the Retail Food Protection Team, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, at retailfoodprotectionteam@fda.hhs.gov.