

## **Update on the Salmonella Typhimurium Outbreak**

### **FDA / CDC Joint Media Teleconference**

**January 16, 2009**

Coordinator: Good afternoon and thank you for standing by. At this time, all participants are in a listen-only mode. After the presentation, we will conduct a question and answer session.

Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time. And now I would like to introduce your host for today's conference, Mr. Mike Herndon. Sir, you may begin.

Michael Herndon: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, welcome. This is Michael Herndon from FDA's Office of Public Affairs. This is an FDA teleconference for credentialed media to ask questions about the ongoing investigation of the salmonella outbreak.

We have speakers today from the Food and Drug Administration and from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Our two speakers this afternoon are Dr. Stephen Sundlof, Director of Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, FDA and Dr. Robert Tauxe, Deputy Director Division of Foodborne, Bacterial and Mycotic Diseases CDC.

We also have officials on hand to answer any questions that may fall under their area of expertise later on in this briefing. Our subject matter experts are, (Robert Wagner), Director of Office of Compliance, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition with FDA; Michael Rogers, Director Division of Field Investigations, Office of Regional Operations, also with FDA; and Dr. Casey Barton Behravesh, Senior Science Officer, Outbreak Net Team with CDC.

Now after the speakers make brief remarks, we will move to the question and answer segment. Reporters will be in a listen-only mode until we open the call up for questions. When asking a question, please state your name and affiliation. Also, please limit yourself to one question and one follow up so we can get in as many questions as possible.

At this time, I will turn it over to Dr. Stephen Sundlof.

Stephen Sundlof: Thank you, Mike. This is Dr. Stephen Sundlof and I have an opening statement here and this is it. For the past few weeks, FDA has been collaborating with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and public health officials in many states around the country in an ongoing investigation of a multi-state outbreak of human infections due to Salmonella Serotype Typhimurium.

We are taking this opportunity to talk to the media since this investigation began. We are holding this media call today because we want the public to know what we've learned from our investigations and what it has told us so far and where that might lead us.

So where we are; at this time, we've traced one likely source of Salmonella Serotype Typhimurium contamination to a plant owned by the Peanut Corporation of America in Georgia which makes both brand of peanut butter distributed in bulk to large institutions like nursing homes. And also produces a peanut paste which is a concentrated product consisting of ground roasted peanuts that is distributed to food manufactures to be used as an ingredient in many of the products including cookies, crackers, cereal and ice cream.

So given the potentially wide distribution of this peanut paste and peanut butter which is also used as an ingredient in numerous products, we urge companies to check their records of their supply chain and determine if their peanut ingredient came from PCA, which is the Peanut Corporation of America.

And if so, to take the appropriate precautionary actions to move those affected products from distribution following the lead of other companies who have already voluntarily taken action to remove potentially affected products from the market on a proactive basis.

This is a very active and dynamic investigation but we don't yet have the data to provide consumers with specific information about what brands or products they should avoid. As the investigation continues and leads to specific products, we will share that information with the public.

Let me talk a little bit about the investigation itself. Preliminary analysis of the epidemiologic study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the information from clusters of illnesses identified in several states comparing food eaten by the ill people as well as well people suggests that peanut butter and peanut butter-containing products are the likely source. But this is not definitive.

The epidemiological investigation by the Minnesota Department of Health suggested King Nut creamy peanut butter as a likely source of salmonella infections among several ill persons in Minnesota. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture Laboratory isolated the outbreak strain from an open 5-pound container of King Nut brand creamy peanut butter taken from a nursing home there.

The product is distributed in several states in institutions such as long-term care facilities, hospitals and cafeterias. On January 10, the King Nut Company, which is the distributor of the peanut butter manufactured by Peanut Corporation of America, voluntarily recalled peanut butter distributed under the King Nut label and voluntarily recalled Parnell's Pride peanut butter which is also distributed by King Nut and manufactured by PCA.

On January 13th, the manufacturer of these products, PCA, also issued a voluntary recall. The recall includes all of the peanut butter and peanut paste that PCA manufactured on the days that the peanut butter later recalled by King Nut was manufactured which were certain dates under certain lot numbers between July 1, 2008 and the present.

FDA has initiated inspections at some of the direct consignees of PCA and King Nut and continues to follow the distribution points for these products. Our investigators are collecting distribution and other records in order to make sure all points of the distribution chain are pursued.

Several hundred samples have been taken at multiple locations, including environmental as well as product samples, environmental meaning taking samples of the equipment and the facilities to find out if the salmonella is present in the facility.

FDA is utilizing the services of multiple laboratories to conduct analysis of these samples. Many of our partners and state health departments and agricultural departments around the country are also collecting samples as part of their investigations. Results on these samples will be coming into FDA for further analysis and confirmation. We will of course have an update for you as soon as the results are available.

In conclusion then, as we stated at the outset of this call, this is a very active investigation but we don't yet have the data to provide consumers with specific information about what brands or products they should avoid.

As the investigation continues and leads to specific products, we will share that information with the public. Our goal today has been to share with the public the salient information that we have at this time and we will continue to provide updates as new information is made available.

FDA continues to provide updated information regarding the ongoing investigation on our Web site. We have just posted a set of questions and answer for consumers and all products involved and company actions are also listed on the Web site.

As updated information becomes available, we will share that information through our Web site and other communication vehicles. That concludes my opening statement and now I would like to pass the microphone on to Rob Tauxe at CDC.

Robert Tauxe: Good afternoon, this is Dr. Tauxe at CDC. Today, I'll provide you with a brief update on the current investigation of the outbreak of salmonella typhimurium infections and CDC's role in this complex multi-state outbreak investigation.

We've been collaborating with public health officials across the country and the FDA to investigate the outbreak. All the agencies involved share a common goal to protect the health of the people of America.

We at CDC are concerned and empathize with those who have been affected in this outbreak and with their family members. As Dr. Sundlof mentioned earlier, this is an ongoing investigation that is evolving as we speak.

At this point, our focus is peanut butter. Now, peanut butter is used as an ingredient in many different foods which makes this investigation complicated. In fact, this appears to be an ingredient-driven outbreak.

To date, 453 infections and persons from 43 states and Canada have been reported to us, all infected with the outbreak strain of salmonella typhimurium. Of these 22% are hospitalized and 5 deaths have been reported that may be associated.

The most recent beginning of illness, the most recent onset of illness was December 31 and more cases are reported to us every day. Salmonella typhimurium is the most common type of salmonella and represents about 20% of the approximately 40,000 culture confirmed cases of salmonella that are reported each year to CDC.

But the particular strain of salmonella typhimurium causing this outbreak has a rare DNA fingerprint pattern that we have seen very - only very occasionally before. This strain does not appear to be more virulent than other types of salmonella typhimurium or other types of salmonella. That is, although, many people have been hospitalized and there has been some very severe illness, this severity is typical for salmonella and not more serious than we would expect.

I would like to share how CDC and our state partners have been handling the investigation thus far. As I said, it was first detected by DNA fingerprinting of salmonella in public health labs around the country. PulseNet, which links these laboratories together, is a communication network that in late November found an initial increase in the pattern that had previously been very rare.

This pattern, or the outbreak strain, has continued to increase since then in frequency. Working with public health epidemiologists in the effected state - in the effected states, the next thing that was done was to interview some of the ill people using a list of about 300 food items that they might or might not have eaten to see what was common.

We then chose a shorter list from that list for further investigation. And beginning on January 3rd, CDC and the public health epidemiologists in the effected states interviewed ill and well people in the same communities with a standard list about what they ate to determine whether eating a particular food or foods was related to getting sick.

The preliminary results of that first study indicated a statistical association with eating peanut butter, though it was not with the most common brands that are sold in grocery stores. Now many of the people who became ill remembered eating peanut butter and report it but not all of them did so.

And it made us wonder whether there could be something more than just plain peanut butter involved and we know it can be difficult to remember specific foods or food ingredients, especially if it's eaten just as a quick snack rather than as a meal.

As Dr. Sundlof mentioned, our colleagues in Minnesota found that those who had become ill were sometimes eating peanut butter that was sold to institutions or served in institutions, like long-term care facilities or hospitals or schools rather than peanut butter sold in grocery stores. And they collected a sample of left over peanut butter from an institution that identified a particular institutional brand.

Currently, the states are testing other products containing peanut butter in their laboratories along with the FDA. We are now launching a second case control investigation to focus more specifically on the wider array of products that contain peanut butter. And we anticipate having some preliminary results next week after collecting data throughout the weekend.

CDC and the state health departments are helpful for the willingness of people to participate in the telephone interviews. This information is vital to point to food sources that can be further investigated.

Thank you very much.

Michael Herndon: Thank you, Dr. Tauxe. At this time, ladies and gentlemen, we'll take your questions. And as always to be fair to everyone, please limit yourself to one question and one follow up. And please state your name and affiliation. Operator, we'll take the first question.

Coordinator: If you would like to ask a question, please press star 1. To withdraw your question, please press star 2. One moment please for the first question.

Miriam Falco from CNN Medical News, your line is open.

Miriam Falco: Hi, thanks for taking the question. My first question is, earlier in the week, the CDC had released information saying that there were two genetically very similar strains that you were looking at. Unless I'm missed it, I don't remember hearing you saying that. What does that mean? Are you talking about two different products, is that how you were led to think one was peanut butter and one was this peanut paste? Or is it technically still coming from the same source and that source is the Blakely, Georgia plant?

Robert Tauxe: Sure, this is Dr. Tauxe at CDC. Let me elaborate just a bit. There actually are two very closely related DNA fingerprint patterns that were identified as clustered. They are both - they're increasing in parallel, they're occurring in the same states. And by all other characteristics, they are indistinguishable. So we are calling those two very closely related patterns the outbreak strain.

And in point of fact, the sample of peanut butter that was tested in Minnesota on culture yielded both the closely related patterns. So we're - rather than relating to the two different patterns, since they seem to be traveling together, we're calling that the one strain.

Michael Herndon: All right, Miriam, FDA wants to add something.

Stephen Sundlof: One part of the question that I don't think was addressed was that did we link these back to the company in Georgia, the Peanut Corporation of America. And we have not made that firm link at this point.

Michael Herndon: And that was Dr. Sundlof. Did you have a follow up, Miriam?

Miriam Falco: I did. Is there any other product that you're thinking or is - or are you pretty sure sticking to the peanut family of products? I mean, not tomatoes, not chicken or anything like that? I ask because you listed a veterinarian - veterinary person as one of your experts standing by so I was curious.

Michael Herndon: Dr. Tauxe?

Robert Tauxe: Our focus right now is peanut butter and the wider area of products that might have peanut butter in them. And our staff includes medical officers and veterinary officers. And we consider them interchangeable most of the time.

Michael Herndon: Okay, thank you.

Man: Thanks, Miriam.

Michael Herndon: Next question please.

Coordinator: Brian Hartman from ABC, your line is open.

Brian Hartman: Hi, thanks for taking the question. So I just wanted to talk to you about the weaknesses or the strengths of PulseNet. I looked at the map here and you see a state like Minnesota has 33 cases. And I mean, it would seem to me that they have 33 cases because they have an exceptional Department of Health and then I look at Florida, which has a huge elderly population - Louisiana, South Carolina as (light).

I mean, when I look at this map, can we really say that we have an accurate picture of how many cases are out there or are we just looking at how strong the health departments are in each of these states when we look at the color codes on that map?

Robert Tauxe: I think that that's - thank you for your question, this is Dr. Tauxe. It's a very good question. I think there is clearly a variation that in where products goes or in just who is exposed to it is part of what we are looking at when we're looking at a map like this.

And there is the question, I think, about the requirements of reporting different disease which may actually vary from state to state and that always is a part of what is going on in any surveillance system. But we suspect that the geographic distribution of cases is largely a reflection of where contaminated products has gone.

Michael Herndon: Brian, are you still there?

Brian Hartman: I am, yeah.

Michael Herndon: Okay. Dr. Sundlof wants to add something.

Stephen Sundlof: Yes, we are looking at the distributions. There's really two parts to the question. One is, is there uniform reporting by the states. And two, is this a result of distribution. And we are feeding the distribution information to the Centers for Disease Control as they continue their epidemiologic studies.

I can tell you, you mentioned Florida as one state (unintelligible) cases. What our distribution records for PCA so far indicates that there is very little distribution in the southeastern United States but wide distribution in other parts of the United States.

Michael Herndon: All right.

Brian Hartman: Thank you.

Michael Herndon: All right, next question please.

Coordinator: Elizabeth Weise, USA Today, your line is open.

Elizabeth Weise: Hey, thanks for taking my call. I actually have a couple of quick questions. First off, given all this information, what should consumers be doing right now? And then, what percentage of the hits you're getting are peanut butter versus peanut product? And did you ever get any hits on unopened tubs?

Stephen Sundlof: Okay, this is Steve Sundlof. Well, as we said at the outset of the call, this is a very active investigation and we cannot point to specific products at this point in time. Certainly, I think Dr. Tauxe spoke about the national name brand peanut butter products that are in grocery stores have not been implicated at this time.

There are other products that may contain peanuts. For instance, we know - you're aware that snack - peanut butter sandwich crackers have been mentioned as a possible source of the outbreak.

We really can't give more information - more specific product information at this point other than the fact that unopened tubs of peanut butter or finished products are certainly products that people should, you know, be more cautious about.

Michael Herndon: And what was your second question, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Weise: Early on, you said that there was a - you were finding a pretty substantial number of illnesses not related to peanut butter but to peanut products and I was wondering what that percentage was.

Michael Herndon: I think that's a CDC question.

Robert Tauxe: What we found was that in our first study, that there were about two-thirds of the patients reported that they had eaten peanut butter. And that - and we focused increased attention on the one-third that said they hadn't had peanut butter. And exploring that in much greater depth found that often there would be a peanut butter-containing food that they recalled eating when they were interviewed in some depth.

And I don't have a percentage for you, but we were impressed that there were peanut butter-containing foods that didn't leap to the memory when you asked somebody had you eaten peanut butter that we thought needed to explore more in greater detail which is why we're launching the study this weekend.

Miriam Herndon: Okay. And just a final piece was, have we ever gotten a positive salmonella typhimurium test out of an unopened tub of peanut butter from PCA?

Stephen Sundlof: This is Steve Sundlof. At this point, we have not. But let me just say that that's because - not because - but we have - the samples are currently being processed in the laboratory. So the answer to the question is no, we have not but we may very soon if the laboratory results come back positive.

Michael Herndon: Okay, thank you, Elizabeth. Next question please.

Coordinator: Richardo Alonoso-Zaldivar from the Associated Press, your line is open.

Richardo Alonoso-Zaldivar: Thank you for taking my question. You mentioned that you're following the distribution chain from PCA to the rest of the country. And can you tell us, how many companies have you found in that distribution chain and can you give us some kind of description of what kind of companies they are? And I have a follow up.

Woman: We have 84 manufacturers...

Stephen Sundlof: Yes, I just got the numbers. They have 85 direct accounts. In other words, they - PCA is distributing directing to 85 different accounts, some of those are end products, some of those are - go through further distribution channels to various companies that make these various products like snack cakes and crackers and things like that.

Michael Herndon: What was the second question?

Richardo Alonoso-Zaldivar: Well, that's part of my first question though really is can you describe these 85 companies?

Man: Yeah, they basically consists of distributors and manufacturers. And they're again, a - you know, obviously they are all related to the food industry. But that's about as specific as I can get.

Michael Herndon: All right, what was your next question?

Richardo Alonoso-Zaldivar: My second question is, you know, peanut butter is not really thought of as a high risk food. And could you explain to us, what is - is there something about peanut butter that, you know, maybe we don't know that we need to know? Or what is it that might cause salmonella to, you know, to grow and thrive in a tub of peanut butter?

Stephen Sundlof: Peanut butter...

Richardo Alonoso0-Zaldivar: Who's speaking please?

Stephen Sundlof: This is Steve Sundlof, I'm sorry. Peanut butter is not a food that supports the growth of bacterial in general. And one of the reasons is that it has very little water and water is necessary to support the growth of bacteria which is why you can open your jar of peanut butter and put it back in the cupboard and it doesn't - it becomes - it doesn't become contaminated over time with bacteria.

Having said that, salmonella and other bacteria, if they are introduced into peanut butter but it's salmonella in particular here, they are not in any way

destroyed, they don't continue to grow in the peanut butter. But they similarly are not killed by anything in the peanut butter. And so they sit there in a somewhat dormant state. And if consumed, they can then multiply and cause illness.

So the whole, you know, the prevention step is to make sure the processes being used for this peanut butter does not allow the introduction of salmonella or other bacteria. And so - and that is apparently what happened in this case. And we another case a couple of years ago in which we found, again, that there was salmonella in the peanut butter plant that had contaminated the peanut butter.

Michael Herndon: Okay, thanks, Richardo.

Richardo Alonoso-Zaldivar: Thank you.

Michael Herndon: Next question, please.

Coordinator: Lisa Schnirring, CIDRAP News, your line is open.

Lisa Schnirring: Hi, I'm wondering if you know if there are any other companies that might have recalls or product advisories and alerts. And also, my other question is, do you consider this outbreak ongoing, are you continuing to see brand new cases? Thanks.

Michael Herndon: I believe that's a CDC question so we will ask them.

Robert Tauxe: This is Dr. Tauxe, I can answer the second part of the question but not the first.

Michael Herndon: Okay.

Robert Tauxe: Yes, we are seeing - new cases or recent cases are being reported. As I said, the most recent onset, the most recent case of illness began on December 31, so that's a little over two weeks ago. We know it takes typically two to three weeks after someone gets sick in order to be cultured, for the (isolate) to be reported through in our system.

So we have a built-in delay in our reporting system that means that I wouldn't expect to be hearing about cases that just got sick last week. So we do consider this to be ongoing.

Lisa Schnirring: Okay, thanks.

Stephen Sundlof: And this is Dr. Sundlof. And on this first part of your question, when we are notified by companies that they are taking a recall or product - ordering a product stop sale or hold, we are linking to them on our Web site. So if you go to our Web site and want to know which companies are taking products off of the retail shelves, you can find it there.

Lisa Schnirring: Okay. Dr. Tauxe, how many states did you say have cases now - 40 - is it 43?

Robert Tauxe: It is 43 states and there is one case in Canada.

Lisa Schnirring: Okay, thanks.

Michael Herndon: All right, thank you. Next question please.

Coordinator: Sandra Young from CNN, your line is open.

Sandra Young: Yes, hi, thanks for taking my call. First question is, the - in Minnesota, they found this one open container. And some of the results from the plant may have tested positive to it. What other products have surfaced in other states? Can you be a little bit more specific about that?

Stephen Sundlof: I don't think we can be any more specific than that.

Michael Herndon: Did you have another - did you have a follow up?

Sandra Young: Yes, I'd like to follow up.

Michael Herndon: Okay.

Sandra Young: How long does it take to get these samples back?

Stephen Sundlof: It depends. Let me just talk about the difficulty in dealing with trying to culture these salmonella out of products like peanut butter. First of all, they're generally there in very low concentrations. And again, they don't multiply.

So first of all, they have to be cultured and that takes some - a day or two just to grow up to the point where they can undergo some preliminary testing. So generally, we screen them with a test that will tell us if we're in the ballpark. It won't tell us even if it's a salmonella organism.

And after that, if we get a positive on that - that test and we take a number of samples of each product that we test - and we can go back with a more definitive test that will identify it as a salmonella - and in this case, a salmonella typhimurium. That's not end.

Then after that process occurs, which takes a few more days, then we have to determine if it is the same outbreak strain that we've been seeing. And that requires (unintelligible) electrophoresis. So it's a multi-step process. Unfortunately, we have not figured out a way to coax the bacteria to grow any faster than they can grow. And that's what takes a lot of the time.

Sandra Young: Okay, thank you.

Michael Herndon: All right, thanks, Sandra. Next question please.

Coordinator: Greg Schneider, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, your line is open.

Greg Schneider: Hi, thanks for taking the questions. I wanted to get a better sense of where things stand on the investigation into the Blakely, Georgia plant? There was some contamination there but has it been identified as salmonella?

Stephen Sundlof: Yeah, we have positively identified salmonella in that plant in the...

Greg Schneider: Who is speaking - I'm sorry.

Stephen Sundlof: I'm sorry, this is Dr. Sundlof. So we do know based on our investigate that salmonella - there is some salmonella contamination within the plant. We do not know if it's typhimurium at this point and we certainly don't know if it's the outbreak strain.

Michael Herndon: Greg, did you have a follow up?

Greg Schneider: Because this plant is in Georgia, can you tell me whether or not this product has been distributed or if any of the ill people are in Georgia or specifically in the metro-Atlanta area?

Stephen Sundlof: Yeah, I think that's Dr. Tauxe.

Greg Schneider: I'm sorry?

Michael Herndon: We will refer to Dr. Tauxe.

Robert Tauxe: Okay, I can say for CDC that there are six cases that have been reported from Georgia. I don't know at the moment whether they are in - where their location in Georgia is. The Georgia State Health Department would know.

Greg Schneider: I had one quick question for the clarification. I think earlier you said it may be linked to five deaths. The Associated Press is now saying six deaths.

Robert Tauxe: Yes, as of last night, which is when we closed our reporting, we had five states that were reported - I'm sorry - five deaths that were reported by the states to be, in their opinion, likely to be associated with this outbreak.

Yeah, I understand there may be another death where that decision is being made. But that hasn't been - that wasn't reported to us by our surveillance deadline.

Michael Herndon: All right, thank you, Greg.

Operator, we'll take two more questions. Can we have the next caller please?

Coordinator: (Makasata Ariyana) from the Detroit Free Press, your line is open.

Makasata Ariyana: Hi, thank you for taking my call. I'm wondering if you have started any agricultural investigation yet and to peanut suppliers to the company or are

you still really focusing on what's going on inside the production side of things.

Stephen Sundlof: We are looking at one peanut grower but we're really concentrating our investigation on the plant and the downstream distribution.

Michael Herndon: Did you have a follow up?

Makasata Ariyana: I did. Earlier - unless I misunderstood - you were saying that the DNA type of this particular typhimurium was quite rare. Has it popped up previously in another outbreak?

Michael Herndon: We'll defer to CDC.

Robert Tauxe: Yes, this is Dr. Robert Tauxe. I don't believe we have had an outbreak caused by this particular strain before. We are aware of a very small number of cases that have occurred in recent years but not of an actual outbreak.

Makasata Ariyana: Thank you.

Michael Herndon: All right, we'll take the final question please.

Coordinator: Kate Bromberek, the Associated Press, your line is open.

Kate Bromberek: I think most of my questions have been answered at this point. Thanks for taking my call.

Michael Herndon: Okay.

Kate Bromberek: I mean, I was going to ask about the six deaths because we did get a report from the North Carolina Health Department saying that there was a sixth death - or there was a death in North Carolina that has been linked to this. And so I was going to ask about that. But someone just did so...

Michael Herndon: Okay, all right, thank you. Well ladies and gentlemen, that concludes today's media teleconference. Thank you for your participation. The replay will be available in about an hour and will be available until January 23rd. If you have follow up questions, please don't hesitate to call the respective agencies.

Also, please check both the FDA and CDC Web sites for updated information that was discussed here today. Thanks and have a great weekend.

Coordinator: This concludes today's conference call. You may disconnect at this time.

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