



Fonterra admits botulism contamination

WELLINGTON (AFP) - New Zealand warned international health authorities Saturday of exported dairy products, including infant formula, containing bacteria that could lead to botulism -- a potentially fatal illness.

The government said the contaminated whey protein concentrate, or products using this ingredient, had been exported to Australia, China, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Dairy giant Fonterra, which manufactured the product more than a year ago, said eight customers had been advised and were investigating whether any of the affected product was in

their supply chains.

If necessary, contaminated consumer products would be recalled, the company said in a statement.

There have been no reports of any illness linked to consumption of the affected whey protein.

New Zealand Trade Minister Tim Groser said health authorities around the world, including the World Health Organization, had also been alerted to the contamination.

"As soon as New Zealand authorities were notified of this risk, we immediately acted to inform relevant authorities around the world," Groser said.

"This has included formally notifying Infosan, the World Health

Organization's international food safety regulators network. As more information on this issue is confirmed we will provide our trading partners with further updates.

"We understand that the markets to which contaminated whey protein concentrate, or products using this ingredient, has been exported are Australia, China, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Vietnam."

Fonterra said the affected product was used in a range of drinks including infant formula and sports drinks.

"We are doing everything we can to assist our customers in ensuring any product containing this ingredient is removed from

the marketplace and that the public is made aware," Fonterra chief executive Theo Spierings said.

Three batches of whey protein concentrate, manufactured in May last year, recently tested positive for *Clostridium botulinum*.

The batches have been used to form 870 tonnes of products sold in a variety of markets, the Ministry for Primary Industries' Acting Director General Scott Gallacher said.

The symptoms of botulism include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, followed by paralysis, and it can be fatal if not treated.

What Fonterra told Health
Fonterra said it was notified of contamination in May 2021. The contamination was found in three batches of whey protein concentrate (WPC) manufactured in May 2020. The WPC was used in a range of products, including infant formula and sports drinks. Fonterra said it immediately notified the New Zealand government and the World Health Organization (WHO). It also notified its trading partners around the world.

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Fonterra said the potential impact on someone consuming a contaminated product would depend on their age and the amount they consumed.

For an adult, a small amount of contaminated whey protein "would probably pass through unnoticed", Fonterra's managing director of New Zealand milk products, Gary Romano, told reporters.

Dairy exports are New Zealand's major earner and its products are particularly popular in Asia, where they are considered the gold standard.

According to government data, the dairy industry contributes 2.8 percent to New Zealand's GDP and about 25 percent of its exports. It is worth NZ\$10.4 billion (US\$8.1 billion) annually.

New Zealand accounts for one-third of the world's cross-border trade in dairy products.

Fonterra, the world's largest dairy exporter, reported revenues of NZ\$19.8 billion (\$15.5 billion) in the 2012 financial year.

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