Food Safety and the Government Shutdown: What You Should Know

Is the United States at risk of a foodborne outbreak?

January 23, 2019 By Casey Halter

We're four weeks into the U.S. government shutdown, and some people are worried that the nation could be at an increased risk for foodborne illnesses, CNN reports.

Since December 22, 2018, inspectors at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have been furloughed (alongside nearly 800,000 other Americans). That means, for the most part, that food safety inspections had been on hold for the past month, potentially leaving millions of Americans at risk for such illnesses as E. coli, listeria, salmonella, and hepatitis A virus (HAV).

Last week, according to CNN, Sarah Sorscher, deputy director of regulatory affairs for the consumer advocacy group Center for Science in the Public Interest, said the organization was "very concerned" that the shutdown could lead to lapses in food safety. Lawmakers are also wondering about food safety. Representative Rosa DeLauro, a Democrat from Connecticut, is holding a congressional caucus to "highlight how the government shutdown is impacting the USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] and FDA's food safety programs."

Meanwhile, the American Council on Science and Health, another consumer advocacy group, is advising Americans to rinse their fruits and vegetables moving forward and to make sure to cook their meat properly, adding: "Just do all the normal things that you should do all the time anyway and you should be just fine."

For those still worried, the FDA also announced last week that it would restart inspections of high-risk foods that had been stopped because of a lack of funding—recalling 150 furloughed people to their positions. That's in addition to FDA inspectors already assigned to high-risk inspections of products such as foreign food, which were ongoing due to outbreak concerns.

Among the foods the FDA considers "high risk" for outbreaks include: seafood; dairy products, including soft and semisoft cheeses; custard-filled bakery products; unpasteurized juices; fresh fruits and vegetables; prepackaged sandwiches; ready-to-eat salads; and infant formula.

"There is no question this has an impact, and it is not business as usual," FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb tweeted earlier this month, adding, "There is a very concerted effort to stand up critical

functions and to focus on our consumer protection mission.”

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/article/food-safety-government-shutdown-know