

SAFEGUARDS

CONSUMER GOODS AND RETAIL

FOOD

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SAFETY CONCERNS WITH WHEY PROTEIN CONCENTRATE CONTAMINATED WITH *CLOSTRIDIUM BOTULINUM*

Health ministries are closely following developments after the release of a food safety warning by New Zealand's Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) on August 3rd. MPI announced that the food safety warning affects a range of products manufactured from whey protein concentrate produced at a single New Zealand manufacturing site of Fonterra in May 2012. The whey concentrate appears to contain a strain of *Clostridium botulinum*, which can cause botulism.

New Zealand dairy giant Fonterra announced on 3 August 2013 that infant formula, sports drinks and other products sold in several countries including China could be tainted after tests found bacteria in whey protein concentrate that could cause botulism.

According to the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, whey protein concentrate and products made from it is known to have been exported to Australia, China, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Viet Nam and Hong Kong.²

MPI advises a food safety issue relating to contamination of some batches of milk whey protein. This whey protein may contain *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria. Contamination potentially occurred when whey protein concentrate was processed in a production line that had not been cleaned appropriately. The whey protein is used in a range of food products, including infant formula. Nutricia has decided to conduct a precautionary recall of these products until all potentially affected batches have been traced.³

In reaction, Chinese authorities have suspended imports of Fonterra-produced whey powder and dairy base powder and increased inspection and supervision at the border for New Zealand dairy products. China has not closed the market to all New Zealand dairy products; and it has also been quite specific about the range of Fonterra products which it has temporarily suspended. There have been no reported illnesses as a result of the contamination.



¹ [MPI exploring food safety issue advise by Fonterra Friday afternoon, Ministry for Primary Industries](#)

² [Whey protein contamination, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#)

³ [Whey protein concentrate contamination, Ministry for Primary Industries](#)

⁴ [Botulism, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

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The US Centers for Disease Control describes botulism as a rare but sometimes fatal paralytic illness caused by a nerve toxin that is produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum* and sometimes by strains of *Clostridium butyricum* and *Clostridium baratii*.⁴

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