

## *Imported Peppers are the Suspected Source of Food Borne Illness*

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The question this summer has been is it safe or not safe to eat fresh tomatoes, and now jalapeño or Serrano peppers. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued an 'all clear' statement on the tomatoes, but as of July 25th are telling folks not to eat jalapeno or Serrano peppers grown in Mexico.

According to Center for Disease Control (CDC), 1200 persons this summer have been infected with Salmonella (Saintpaul strain) in 42 states, Washington, D.C, and Canada. The search for the source has been wide-spread and not unlike looking for a 'needle in a haystack'. All the trace-back searches led to a produce distributor in McAllen, Tex. The questionable peppers were grown on a farm in Mexico but as yet the original source of the contamination is still in question. FDA advises consumers to avoid raw jalapeño and Serrano peppers and the foods that contain them such as some salsas and pica de gallo.



This precaution is especially important for vulnerable populations; seniors, young children, and people with weakened immune systems. It's not advisable to try to rid raw peppers of contamination by washing, peeling or cooking them as these actions are not likely to work and might spread the bacteria to hands, sinks, knives, and other foods.



FDA's advisory does not apply to peppers grown in the U.S. or those that are locally grown. So your first line of defense, if you really must have some spicy peppers this summer, is to buy locally grown ones at a farmer's market. For now those are readily available for us to enjoy.

This food safety issue has been in the news since early June which shows the difficulty in finding the cause of contamination. Watch for further details in the news and for now stay away from peppers imported from Mexico.



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*\*Spanish translation provided by Kelly Loeb through Support of Alzheimer's Association.*