

THE INSIDE SCOOP ON HOW CR IS WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES FOR A SAFE AND HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEM

What the Government Shutdown Means for Food Safety

Because of a 1906 law requiring continuous inspections of meat and poultry products, inspectors from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will continue to perform inspection duties—but without pay—at the facilities they oversee: meat, poultry, processed eggs, and catfish. All other food products—which comprise approximately 80 percent of the food supply—are overseen by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Routine inspections for these food products will be limited unless they are necessary to address an imminent threat, such as an outbreak. Other food inspection activities, including routine testing for bacteria, may also be limited.

California Passes Legislation Addressing Harmful Ultra-Processed Foods

On Sept. 12, 2025, the [California legislature passed bipartisan legislation co-sponsored by Consumer Reports](#)

that would ban unhealthy ultra-processed foods (UPFs) in public schools. The bill passed the Senate by a 40-0 vote, then passed the Assembly by a 72-1 vote. California Gov. Gavin Newsom has until Oct. 12 to sign the bill.

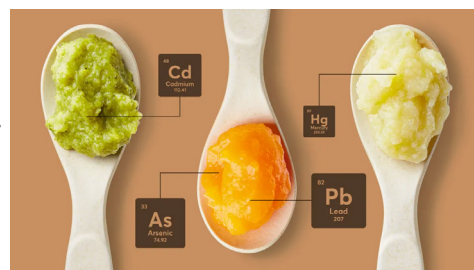
The bill would define a UPF to be a food product that is high in saturated fat, added sugar, or sodium, and that contains one or more of certain industrial ingredients, including colors, flavors, sweeteners, emulsifiers, and thickening agents. The bill also would direct experts at the California Department of Public Health to identify a subcategory of especially harmful UPFs to be phased out of public schools by 2032.



Investigation on Baby Food Test Results

Consumer Reports partnered with Unleaded Kids to identify which baby food companies are doing a good job of disclosing the levels of

toxic heavy metals in their products. Under a California law, all baby food manufacturers selling their products in the state are required to test their products for lead, arsenic, cadmium, and mercury, and make those test results publicly available to consumers on their websites. CR recently [rated the companies' transparency efforts](#).



CR and Unleaded Kids sent a letter to the California Attorney General and the Department of Public Health urging them to investigate some companies for not complying with this law. We considered their response unhelpful and posted about it.

Lack of transparency on food-borne illness outbreaks

Recently, a California family whose family member died of a listeria infection was [informed](#) by their attorney that the death was part of a listeria outbreak. The family was not aware of the link to the outbreak, even though local, state, and federal officials had that information for more than a year. The listeria outbreak involved Lyons ReadyCare and Sysco Imperial Frozen Supplemental Shakes that killed 14 and sickened 42 in 21 states since 2018.

A similar [situation](#) occurred recently in Tennessee, in which the state's Department of Health did not inform a family that their child's death from E. coli was part of an outbreak associated with venison.

The Most Contaminated Chicken Plants

A periodic Consumer Reports [analysis](#) identifies the most contaminated poultry plants in the U.S., based on a review of testing data from the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) at USDA. These plants pose a higher risk of triggering a salmonella outbreak, given the level of salmonella detection at their facilities, although it's important to note that outbreaks can originate from any plant.

Slight Thaw in FDA Hiring Freeze?

In a recent meeting with the FDA Foods Coalition, representatives from the FDA Human Foods Program indicated that they have received a green light to hire a limited number of food safety inspectors and investigators. They warned that hiring levels would be "fairly modest" because it would depend on funding availability.

The FDA Foods Coalition is co-chaired by Consumer Reports and the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA), and is composed of consumer advocates, food industry representatives, public health groups, and state and local regulators. The mission of the coalition is to improve the governance of the FDA Human Foods Program.

Questions Raised About Regenified Label Claim

In a recent [opinion piece](#) published in the trade publication Food Safety News, Consumer Reports Advocacy raised serious questions about the Regenified label claim, asserting that its certification systems may not be backed by meaningful and transparent standards and independent governance. As more companies adopt regenerative claims, the credibility of the standards supporting them will determine whether those claims build trust or fuel accusations of greenwashing.

Food Traceability Rule Delayed

Despite having been enacted into law in January 2011, the FDA agreed to calls from the grocery retail industry

to delay the compliance date for the food traceability rule by an additional two and a half years. The new compliance date will be July 20, 2028, more than 17 years after it became law.

The food traceability rule—which was enacted as part of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)—requires the food industry and grocery retailers to maintain detailed records and create a traceability plan in order to better track potential public health threats and illness outbreaks. The grocery retail industry pushed for a delay to allow it more time to navigate the complexities of the rule.

However, the industry may not be using the extra time for that purpose. One grocery retail executive, who requested anonymity to speak candidly, told CR Advocacy that work on developing traceability plans within the industry ceased following the announcement of the delay. The executive expressed concern that the delay would set back the industry and undermine traceability efforts overall.

Consumer Reports joined other members of the Safe Food Coalition, which consists primarily of consumer and public health groups, in a [letter](#) opposing the rule's delay.

Cut in Foodborne Illness Surveillance

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently announced that it was cutting back on a key surveillance program for foodborne illnesses. The program—Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet)—works with the FDA, the USDA, and 10 state health departments to track foodborne infections caused by eight pathogens.

This surveillance has been reduced to two pathogens: salmonella and E. coli, because they are among the top five contributors to foodborne illnesses. The monitoring of campylobacter, cyclospora, listeria, shigella, vibrio, and yersinia is now optional. Some states may continue tracking all eight pathogens, depending on funding availability, and CDC representatives have claimed that surveillance of some of the other pathogens would be covered by other initiatives. However, despite this, public health advocates warn that those other initiatives are limited, and foodborne illness surveillance overall may be reduced significantly.