

Staying up on recalls can help protect you from harm

By *Teddi Nicolaus*

From baby equipment to ground beef to cars and everything in between, when you buy a product, you expect it to be safe and work the way it should.

Most of the time, everything is fine. After all, there are hundreds of regulations designed to make sure products meet safety standards. But sometimes problems still happen. That's when you might hear a word that can sound scary but is meant to protect you: recall.

So, what is a recall, really? Think of it as a public health heads-up. It's a message that says, "Hey, this product or food might not be safe. Here's what to do next."

When a company or a government agency learns that a product is unsafe, it may be recalled. Sometimes a company finds the problem and pulls the item from shelves on its own. For example, a batch

of lettuce tests positive for salmonella, or a toy is found to contain lead or poses a choking risk. Other times, a government agency steps in

and orders a recall. Either way, the goal is the same — to get unsafe products out of homes and stores before someone is harmed.

You'll often see recalls posted on official government websites, in news alerts or shared through email and social media. If you bought something online or registered a product or appliance, you might even get an email, call or

text telling you that what you purchased is on a recall list.

Food recalls often happen because products are contaminated with harmful germs, contain foreign objects or are missing labels for allergens such as peanuts. These problems can be especially dangerous if you're pregnant, allergic, older or have a weak immune system.

"Recalls are the last line of defense when preventive food safety measures fail," says Thomas Gremillion, director of food policy at the Consumer Federation of America. "Recalls play a critical role in preventing

foodborne illness and maintaining consumer confidence in the food system."

Stores are expected to pull recalled products from their shelves. But reaching consumers who already bought the item can be harder.

Some stores post signs or notices on the shelf or at the checkout. Some retailers also use membership card data to inform customers if they purchased a recalled item.

Recalls are very specific. Only products that match all the listed details, such as the brand, name, lot number and date, need to be avoided. If you find a recalled product at home, don't panic.

"First and foremost, do not eat a recalled product," Gremillion says. "If you can, take it back to the store and ask for a refund."

If you can't return the product, throw it away properly so that other people or animals can't get to it. Never donate recalled food to a food bank.

If a recalled food sneaks into your fridge, don't give it a second chance. Toss it out, then give your refrigerator a thorough cleaning. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, germs in recalled food could spread to drawers or shelves in your refrigerator.

And don't hesitate to call your doctor or veterinarian if you or a family member — pet products are at risk, too — may have used or eaten a recalled product.

Recalls aren't just about food, drugs and cosmetics. They also help prevent injuries from



>> For more recall information, visit [Recalls.gov](https://www.Recalls.gov) and [Foodsafety.gov](https://www.Foodsafety.gov)

everyday items, such as baby strollers with faulty brakes, space heaters that can catch fire, dressers that can tip over or car parts that don't meet safety standards.

"When in doubt, stop using the product," says Courtney Griffin, director of consumer product safety at the Consumer Federation of America.

Griffin recommends that you find the official recall notice online at the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's website and follow the manufacturer's instructions about the steps to take regarding refunds.

"Recalls can vary," Griffin says. "Sometimes there will be a request to throw out the product or there may be modifications that the consumer can make to ensure the product is used safely."

The good news is you don't have to hunt for recalls every day.

Several federal agencies share safety alerts to help protect you and your family and keep you up-to-date about product recalls. Some of their websites let you sign up for free email or text alerts, so recalls come to you instead of the other way around.

[Foodsafety.gov](https://www.Foodsafety.gov) brings together recall information from both the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. [CPSC.gov](https://www.CPSC.gov) provides the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's list of recalls for everyday products like baby gear, appliances, furniture and more.

[NHTSA.gov/recalls](https://www.NHTSA.gov/recalls) shares the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's most up-to-date information about recalls involving vehicles and auto equipment and more. And [Recalls.gov](https://www.Recalls.gov) provides a one-stop-shop for information across federal agencies.

