

Following Peanut Product Recall, Six in Ten Americans Taking Steps to Reduce Their Risk of Getting Sick
Many Mistakenly Believe Recall Involves National Brands of Peanut Butter and Are Not Aware of the Range of Products Involved

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BOSTON, MA — A new national study conducted by the Harvard Opinion Research Program at the Harvard School of Public Health finds that the vast majority (93%) of Americans have heard or read about the recent ongoing recall of peanut products. Among those who are aware of the recall, about six in ten (61%) say they have taken one or more precautions to reduce their risk of getting sick from contaminated peanut products. Specifically, about one in four say they have checked ingredient lists on foods in the grocery store to make sure they know which products contain peanuts (27%), thrown away foods in their home that they think might be on the recall list (25%), stopped ordering foods containing peanuts in restaurants (22%), and stopped eating those foods they heard were in the recall (28%), while 15% say they have stopped eating all foods containing peanuts.

The poll also finds that among those who are aware of the recall, one in four (25%) mistakenly believe that major national brands of peanut butter are involved in the recall. Seventy percent correctly identify peanut butter crackers as being involved. However, less than half are aware that several other products containing peanuts have been recalled, including some in each of the following food categories: snack bars (49%), cakes, brownies, and cookies (45%), pet treats (43%), candy (39%), pre-packaged meals (36%), ice cream (27%), and jars or cans of dry-roasted peanuts (23%).

The survey was conducted between February 4-8, 2009, during the peanut product recall that began on January 12, 2009.

"There's a striking level of awareness of this recall, and many people have taken action. But they're not aware of the range of products involved in the recall," said Robert J. Blendon, professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health. "People should check the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recall list routinely, since the number of products is still growing."

Consumers can search the recall list online at <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/peanutbutterrecall/index.cfm>, or they can call 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) for 24/7 information about the products on the recall list.

Fourteen percent of those who were aware of the recall report having checked the Food and Drug Administration's online list of foods involved and 19% have looked for more information about the recall.

About three-fourths (77%) of those who are aware of the recall do know that it involves contamination by salmonella.

The poll finds low levels of public confidence in groups involved in food production and inspection. More than six in ten Americans express only some or very little confidence in food manufacturers (67%) and the government inspections system (62%) to keep food safe. In addition, a slight majority (52%) say they have only some or very little confidence in grocery stores to keep food safe.

“The results suggest that all those involved in the food safety system need to act quickly to fix the problems and increase public confidence,” said Blendon.

Methodology

This is the 28th in a series of studies on the public and biological security by the Harvard Opinion Research Program (HORP) at Harvard School of Public Health. The study was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH). The project director is Robert J. Blendon of the Harvard School of Public Health. The research team also includes Kathleen J. Weldon and John M. Benson of the Harvard School of Public Health, and Melissa J. Herrmann of ICR/International Communications Research. Fieldwork was conducted via telephone (including both landline and cell phone) for HORP by ICR/International Communications Research of Media (PA) between February 4 and February 8, 2009.

The survey was conducted with a representative national sample of 1,283 adults age 18 and over, including oversamples of African Americans and Hispanics. Altogether 133 African Americans and 124 Hispanics were interviewed. In the overall results, these groups were weighted to their actual proportion of the total adult population.

The margin of error for the total sample is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases, sample data are weighted to the most recent Census data available from the Current Population Survey for gender, age, race, education, region, and number of adults in the household. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, callbacks staggered over times of day and days of the week, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.

This Harvard School of Public Health series is funded under a collaborative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The award enables HORP to provide technical assistance to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as to other national and state government health officials in order to support two critical goals: 1) to better understand the general public’s response to public health emergencies, including biological threats and natural disasters; and 2) to improve related public health communications.

Steps Americans Have Taken in Response to the Peanut Product Recall

Among the 93% who heard about the recall

Took one or more of the following steps

61%

Stopped eating only peanut products heard were involved in recall

28%

Checked ingredient list on foods in store

27%

Threw away food in home that might be on recall list

25%

Stopped ordering food that contains peanuts in restaurants

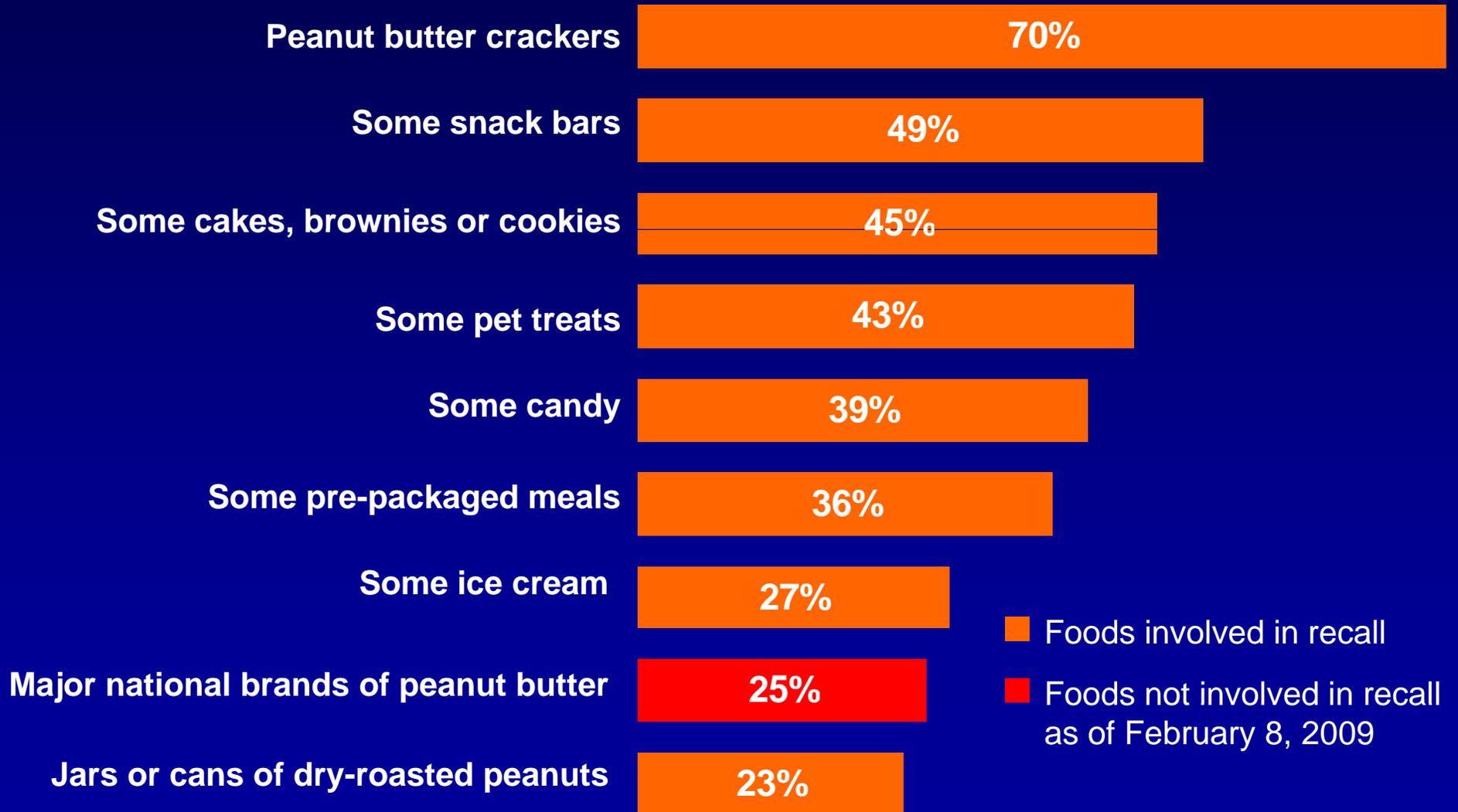
22%

Stopped eating all peanut products

15%

Public Perceptions about the Foods That Have Been Recalled

% who think that each food is involved in the recall, among the 93% who heard about the recall



Harvard Opinion Research Program, Harvard School of Public Health, February 4-8, 2009.