



For Immediate Release:

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Health Alert: **Consumers Warned to Check Cheese for Safety Before They Buy** Dairy products made by unlicensed manufacturers may be dangerous

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles County Health Officer is warning consumers that dairy products, including Latin American-style soft cheese and sour cream, purchased from unlicensed manufacturers or vendors may be made with unpasteurized milk and may contain other contaminants.

“With unlicensed dairy products, you cannot be sure of what you’re getting,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “They may contain unpasteurized milk, have been made in unsanitary conditions, and may have been transported without refrigeration. This is a recipe for disaster, as harmful bacteria in these products can be dangerous to your health and safety.”

Dairy products commonly sold by unlicensed manufacturers include Queso Fresco, Panela, Queso Seco, Asadero, Queso Oaxaca, Queso Cotija, and Crema. Unpasteurized milk and unpasteurized cheese contain raw milk that has not been heated enough during processing to kill harmful bacteria. These bacteria, such as *Listeria*, *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, *bovine Tuberculosis*, and *Brucella*, can cause miscarriage, illness to unborn babies, diarrhea, fever, stomach cramps, swollen neck glands, and/or blood stream infection.

If you get sick from eating unpasteurized or contaminated dairy products, call your doctor immediately. Also, call Public Health at (888) 397-3993.

“Public Health has been working with the Los Angeles City Attorney, Los Angeles County District Attorney, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ensure that harmful products, such as unpasteurized dairy products, are not offered for sale to the public. Everyone should be able to enjoy their favorite foods without the risk of illness or miscarriage,” said Dr. Fielding.

Tips for purchasing safe cheese:

- Avoid dairy products with missing or incomplete labels.
- Labels should provide safe handling and storage information, a list of all the ingredients, including “pasteurized milk”, and identify the manufacturer responsible for the product.
- Cheese products should be factory sealed.
- Buy cheese from the refrigerated section of the market.
- Do not purchase cheese from unlicensed manufacturers, unlicensed vendors at swap meets, door-to-door vendors, or on the street.

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Tips for storing and handling cheese safely include:

- Keep the cheese refrigerated at 41°F or below.
- Wrap the cheese in plastic after each use.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water before handling food items.
- Use different utensils to cut cheese, meat, poultry, and seafood to prevent cross contamination.

If you have any questions or suspect illegal manufacturing or sales of cheese or other dairy products in your community, call Public Health's Food & Milk Program at (626) 430-5400.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>.

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