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Consumer Alert!
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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***“Jamaicans are being strongly urged to avoid all products containing peanut butter until investigations on the potential risk are complete”
– Hon. Karl Samuda, Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce***

The Commerce Minister, Honourable Karl Samuda has mandated the Consumer Affairs Commission (CAC), to monitor the current outbreak of the Salmonella poisoning in the United States that has so far affected 470 person in 43 states with at least 90 persons being hospitalised and six deaths blamed on this recent outbreak.

“The CAC is working with the Bureau of Standards and the Ministry of Health to ensure that our consumers do not unwittingly eat harmful or unsafe products,” Minister Samuda said. He was addressing the role of relevant agencies under his Ministry who are responsibly for Food Safety.

At least one local supermarket was reported in the press on Monday, January 19 as voluntarily removing some jars of peanut butter from its shelves.

The US Food and Drug Administration today advised consumers across the US not to eat products that have peanut butter until they have better information, one report said.

The number of products implicated in the salmonella outbreak has grown since Saturday, January 17. According to USFDA report, the recalls followed a request late last week from the agency for salmonella testing by food companies that may have bought peanut butter or peanut paste from a Georgia facility owned by the Peanut Corp. of America.

Valentine's Day treats are being recalled and Kellogg, the world's largest cereal maker, has now recalled over 17 products which affected the Keebler brand of soft Batch Homestyle Peanut Butter Cookies, Famous Amos Peanut Butter Cookies Keebler Cheese & Peanut Butter Sandwich Crackers – over seven million cases have been recalled.

Minister Samuda is urging that the Jamaican consumer refrain from eating all peanut based products until the outbreak has been thoroughly investigated. "The BSJ is now in the field checking with suppliers and merchants to ascertain whether we have received any of these products", We need more information and until we get a complete picture, we are asking persons not to consume any peanut products," Minister Samuda said.

As of January 19 these are the recalls posted on various news sites:

- Kellogg recalled 16 products containing peanut butter, including Keebler cheese and peanut butter sandwich crackers and Keebler and Famous Amos peanut butter cookies.
- Ralcorp Frozen Bakery Products Inc. is recalling all Wal-Mart Bakery brands of peanut butter cookies, peanut butter no-bake cookies, and peanut butter fudge no-bake cookies. It is also recalling its nationally distributed Lofthouse brand versions of those cookies as well as Parco Foods' Chuck's Chunky brand of peanut butter cookies and Pastries Plus gourmet cookies.
- The South Bend Chocolate Company, of South Bend, Ind., is recalling assorted chocolates, valentine hearts, peanut butter fudge and peanut butter chocolate fudge.
- Meijer Inc. of Grand Rapids, Michigan, is pulling back two types of crackers and two varieties of ice cream sold in five states at its stores and at gas stations.
- General Mills of Minneapolis is recalling two flavors of snack bars: Larabar Peanut Butter Cookie snack bars, distributed nationally, and JamFrakas Peanut Butter Blisscrisp` snack bars.
- Food Lion, of Salisbury, N.C., with stores in the southeast and mid-Atlantic states, has removed Bake Shop peanut butter cookies from its shelves.
- McKee Foods Corp. of Collegedale, Tenn., recalled Little Debbie Peanut Butter Toasty and Peanut Butter Cheese Sandwich Crackers.
- Hy-Vee Inc., of Des Moines, which distributes in several states in the Midwest, recalled various bakery products containing peanut butter.
- Perry's Ice Cream, of Buffalo, New York, announced a voluntary recall of select ice cream products containing peanut butter sauce, which were distributed in five states.

The recalls followed a request late last week from the FDA for salmonella testing by food companies that may have bought peanut butter or peanut paste from a Georgia facility owned by the Peanut Corp. of America.

At least 85 companies reportedly purchased peanut products from the Georgia plant, and 30 have been "urged" to run their own tests for the bacteria, the Associated Press reported.

It's still not clear whether the salmonella that was found at the plant is the cause of the massive outbreak, health officials said Friday, but testing continues.

The concern mainly is about peanut paste, since it is used in dozens of products, from baked goods to cooking sauces. Initially, federal and state investigators had focused on bulk containers of peanut butter sold to institutions such as nursing homes, but not to supermarkets, the AP said.

The strain of salmonella involved with the outbreak has been identified as *Salmonella Typhimurium*, the most common often found in uncooked eggs and meats, experts said.

Consumers may recall that the CAC issued several alerts in 2007 after US company ConAgra recalled its Peter Pan brand peanut butter, which had been linked to at least 625 salmonella cases in 47 states.

ConAgra has since issued a notice that none of its products were at risk this time because the company does not buy from Peanut Corp. of America.

The BSJ and the CAC will continue to work together to ascertain whether these product are here in Jamaica and if so, if they are of the batches contaminated by the deadly bacteria.

SOURCES:

U.S. Food and Drug Administration; Consumer Protection & Safety Commission; FOX News, AP News Report; Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection and ScoutNews.