

# Serving Up Food Safety



From the Food Safety Education  
Program  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension  
Service

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## Sesame Named a Major Food Allergen

There are over 160 foods that can cause allergic reactions in people. Congress initially passed the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (*FALCPA*) that identified eight foods as major food allergens (they account for 90% of food allergic reactions) and include: milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soybeans.

A new act was passed, Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research Act (*FASTER*) that went into effect January 1, 2023 that declared **sesame** as the 9th major food allergen. Food allergies and food hypersensitivities affect millions in the U.S. They are the body's immune system reacting to certain proteins in food. Symptoms can be mild to severe and can appear within minutes or up to 2 hours and include: hives/rash, tingling or itchy sensation, facial swelling, vomiting and/or diarrhea, dizziness, coughing/wheezing, difficulty breathing, drop in blood pressure or anaphylaxis (which can be fatal).

There is no cure for food allergies though some can be outgrown, but prevention and therapeutic approaches are being developed.

Be cautious as the new law does not require food products that were already on their way to store shelves before 2023 to list sesame as an allergen on the label. Therefore, these food products do not need to be removed from the marketplace or relabeled. Some packaged foods can have a long shelf life, so proceed with caution during this transition period.

Also be cautious of "cross-contact", which occurs when a residue or trace amount of the allergen becomes incorporated into another food not intended to contain the allergen.

**Sesame** can appear as benne, benne seed, benniseed, gingelly, gingelly oil, gomasio, halvah, sesame flour, paste, oil or salt, sesame seed, sesamol, sesamum indicum, sesamolina, sim sim, tahini, tahina, tehina or til and possibly hidden as "natural flavors" or "spices".

### Sources and more information:

<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies>  
<https://www.fs.is.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/food-allergies>  
<https://foodandnutrition.org/from-the-magazine/sesame-becomes-the-ninth-major-allergen-in-the-u-s/>



Image courtesy of USDA



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## Recent Shigella Outbreak in Texas. What is *Shigella*?

Shigellosis is a bacterial infection caused by *Shigella* bacteria. The bacteria spreads easily by hand-to-mouth contact with stool (feces). People can become infected by eating food prepared by someone with shigellosis, swallowing water while swimming in a lake or improperly treated swimming pool, or touching surfaces or items contaminated with the bacteria from someone with an infection, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS).

Health officials are investigating a recent outbreak of *Shigella* in Lavaca County as of the beginning of June. In late May, individuals started seeking medical help which spurred healthcare providers to reach out to authorities.

As of early June, 60 cases were likely associated with this outbreak, but testing was expected to continue. Texas DSHS is currently conducting ongoing investigations into facilities and interviews with sick individuals to help determine the cause of the outbreak. As of now, it is thought to have originated from a local restaurant, Cabos San Lucas Mexican Grill, but the source is unknown currently.

Symptoms of *Shigella*: vomiting, diarrhea, which may contain blood and/or mucus, stomach pain, fever, or urge to pass stool (poop) but bowels are empty. Symptoms usually start 1-2 days after infection and last 7 days.

Health care providers are encouraged to test patients that have any related symptoms. Anyone experiencing symptoms of *Shigella* should visit their doctor and get tested.

### Sources and more information:

<https://www.dshs.texas.gov/news-alerts/health-advisory-shigellosis-outbreak-lavaca-county> <https://www.foodsafetynews.com/2023/06/officials-say-dozens-sick-in-shigella-outbreak-linked-to-restaurant-in-texas/>



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