

The Cadbury salmonella scare of 2006

From the sweeties.net wiki

In 2006 Cadbury, then Cadbury Schweppes, faced a damaging episode: salmonella in its chocolate, and questions about how long it had known.

What went wrong

On 20 January 2006 the company detected a strain of Salmonella Montevideo in its products. The cause was a leaking pipe at its plant in Marlbrook, Herefordshire, from which waste water had been dripping onto a production line making chocolate crumb, a key ingredient in milk chocolate. Seven products were affected.

The delay

The contamination was serious, but what caused the biggest outcry was the time it took to report it. It was not until about six months after the problem was detected that Cadbury Schweppes told the Food Standards Agency, the government body responsible for food safety in the UK. The company was unable to explain the delay satisfactorily, and it was strongly criticised for it.

The recall

Once the Food Standards Agency knew, it ordered Cadbury to recall more than a million chocolate bars. By December 2006, the company said that dealing with the incident had cost about £30m.

In court

In April 2007 Birmingham City Council announced it would prosecute the company for breaching food safety law, and further charges followed. The company pleaded guilty to all nine charges and was fined £1m at Birmingham Crown Court.

Why it mattered

Salmonella is a bacterium that can cause food poisoning. Chocolate, being low in moisture, is not the kind of food people usually worry about, which made the case all the more alarming. But the lasting lesson was about openness: food businesses are expected to tell the regulator quickly when something goes wrong, so that unsafe products can be taken off the shelves.

Not the only one

Chocolate makers have faced other salmonella scares since. In 2022, Ferrero recalled Kinder products across Europe after a salmonella outbreak linked to one of its factories: see [the Kinder salmonella recall](#).

What it means for shoppers

Recalls are published by the Food Standards Agency, and shops remove the affected products. If you ever buy a product that is recalled, stop eating it and return it. Food safety and allergen information matter as much in sweets as anywhere else, which is why every sweet in our pick and mix shows its full ingredients and allergens: see [how to read a sweet label](#).

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