

US rejects 1/3rd of MDH exports since October over salmonella

The refusal rate since October 2023 has doubled from 15 per cent for all shipments sent in the year prior.

Written by [Aggam Walia](#)

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Between October 2022 and September 2023, the refusal rate stood at 15 per cent, data obtained from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) revealed.

The United States customs authorities refused 31 per cent of all spice-related shipments exported by Mahashian Di Hatti (MDH) Pvt Ltd over salmonella contamination in the last six months.

The refusal rate since October 2023 has doubled from 15 per cent for all shipments sent in the year prior. The surge in refusal rate over salmonella contamination in recent months comes at a time when both [Singapore and Hong Kong have suspended sales of certain MDH and Everest Food Products Pvt Ltd products](#) after the alleged detection of a carcinogenic pesticide in spice mixes.

A total of 11 shipments amounting to nearly one-third of all shipments from MDH containing products categorised as “spices, flavours, and salts” have been refused since October 2023, which is when the ongoing US federal fiscal year started. Between October 2022 and September 2023, the refusal rate stood at 15 per cent, data obtained from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) revealed.

Additionally, all MDH export shipments refused since October 2020 were on the grounds of salmonella contamination, the data showed. When consumed, foods



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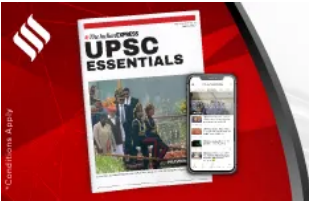
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contaminated with the bacteria salmonella can cause a severe stomach infection that affects the intestinal tract if not cooked properly.

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“Salmonella contamination happens due to unhygienic practices. If you maintain hygiene practices right through the value chain, from harvesting to processing to packaging, you should not be getting salmonella,” a food safety expert said.



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The FDA had physically inspected MDH’s manufacturing plant in January 2022, during which it noted that the “plant did not have adequate sanitary facilities and accommodations”. It also observed that the plant’s “equipment and utensils were not designed and constructed to be adequately cleaned or maintained to protect against contamination”.

MDH did not respond to an email query seeking comments.

In the ongoing US federal fiscal year (October 2023 to September 2024), 0.3 per cent of all Everest export shipments have been refused against 3 per cent in the previous fiscal year. In absolute numbers, a total of 5 shipments have been refused since October 2023. The refusals were primarily over labelling-related violations.

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Everest did not respond to an email query seeking comments.

Overall, between US FY21 and FY23, roughly 10 per cent of all refused human food shipments originating in India belonged to the “spices, flavours, and salts” category, second only to “miscellaneous food related items”, which accounted for 31 per cent of all refusals. “Snack food items” and “bakery products” recorded a refusal rate of 9 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively.

According to FDA’s guidelines, if a shipment is refused entry, the importer can either destroy it or export it out of the US. FDA does not publish data on what happens to shipments once they are refused entry.

In US FY23, products exported under the “spices, flavours, and salts” category by [Ahmedabad](#)-based Ramdev Food Products Private Limited saw a refusal rate of 2 per cent, which has increased to 3 per cent in the ongoing FY24. Over half of these refusals were over salmonella contamination. Similarly, export of spices by MTR Foods Private Limited saw a refusal rate of 1 per cent in FY23, which has remained the same in the ongoing FY24, also primarily over salmonella contamination.

Ramdev Foods and MTR did not respond to queries emailed for comments.

In response to Hong Kong and Singapore suspending sales of certain MDH and Everest products, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has initiated country-wide quality checks for different brands of powdered spices.

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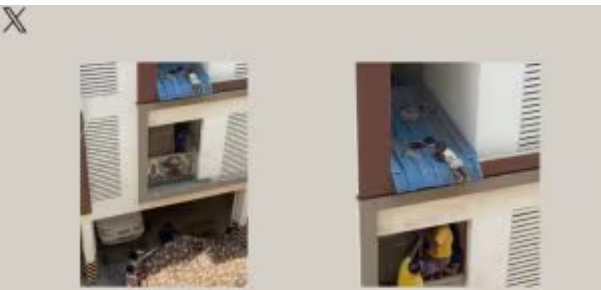
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Hong Kong suspended sales of three MDH spice blends and an Everest spice mix for fish curries. Singapore ordered a recall of the Everest spice mix for containing high levels of ethylene oxide, which is unfit for human consumption and a cancer risk with long term exposure.

[The Indian Express](#) had earlier reported that a [total of 3,925 human food export shipments from India were refused entry at US customs](#) between US FY20 and FY23. Of these, 953 shipments (24 per cent) were refused entry for being “filthy” and 786 shipments (20 per cent) were refused for containing salmonella. The most frequent product categories to face entry refusals were spices, vitamins, minerals and proteins, bakery products, and seafood products. Moreover, India’s food exports refusal rate stood at 0.15 per cent during this period, seven times China’s rate of 0.022 per cent and six times Mexico’s rate of 0.025 per cent.

Incidentally, refusal of food export shipments from India has seen a downward trend in the last decade in absolute terms, from a peak of 1,591 refusals in US FY15 to 1,033 refusals in FY23.

A study by the US Department of Agriculture published in 2022 found that between 2002 and 2019, India had the most pathogen-related violations with 5,115 food import refusals out of over 22,000 pathogen and toxin violations that were identified, a share of 22.9 per cent. Mexico came in second with a 13.9 per cent share followed by Vietnam with an 8.6 per cent share.

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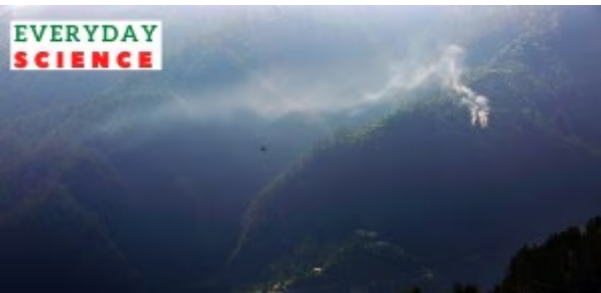


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