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## Beef Recall for E. Coli Is Expanded to 21.7 Million Pounds

By ROBERT D. McFADDEN

A meat company yesterday issued a nationwide recall for 21.7 million pounds of ground beef products after reports of up to 25 cases of illness caused by suspected E. coli bacteria in eight states, including New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, federal officials reported.

The recall, by the Topps Meat Company of Elizabeth, N.J., covers a wide range of frozen hamburger patties and other products manufactured over the last year and bearing a "sell by" date or "best used by" date between last Tuesday and Sept. 25, 2008, along with the United States Department of Agriculture designation EST 9748.

The voluntary recall, an expanded version of one issued last Tuesday for nearly 332,000

pounds of Topps beef, was the first in the 67-year history of Topps, one of the nation's largest meat processing concerns. It was also one of the larger meat recalls of recent years, the Agriculture Department's Food Safety Inspection Service said.

Amanda Eamich, a spokeswoman for the service, said the expanded recall was based on an additional sample of meat contaminated with the E. coli O157:H7 strain, as reported by the New York State Health Department; by findings of an inspection service safety assessment; and by new reports of illnesses under inquiry in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Maine, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

In Florida, Scott P. Schlesinger, a lawyer for Samantha Safranek, 15, of Pembroke Pines, said she

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**As many as 25 illnesses are reported in eight states.**

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became ill after eating a Topps hamburger Aug. 17, was hospitalized on Aug. 23, and underwent dialysis before recovering. He said federal and Florida health officials confirmed the E. coli link to Topps on Sept. 7, and he questioned why it took weeks to recall the products.

Claudia S. Hutton, a New York State Health Department spokeswoman, said that suspected cases of E. coli linked to Topps dated to July, but that none were confirmed until an Albany resident became ill this month and a

Topps patty found in his refrigerator was found by the Health Department to contain the E. coli strain.

E. coli O157:H7 is a food-borne bacterium that can cause bloody diarrhea and dehydration. It usually clears up within a week in adults, but can be deadly in infants, older people and those with compromised immune systems.

Geoffrey Livermore, Topps's vice president of operations, said the recalled products were distributed to retail grocers and food service institutions throughout the United States over the past year. Based on consumption patterns, he said, the company believes most of the products have already been consumed, but he urged people to check their freezers and dispose of any meat covered by the recall.