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# Mechanically Tenderized Beef (MTB) New Federal Labelling Requirements in Effect August 21, 2014

## What's the Rationale for the New Federal Labelling Requirements?

In 2012, a large outbreak of E.coli 0157:H7 occurred in Alberta. The outbreak caused one of the largest recalls of beef in Canadian history. The investigation found that the illnesses were caused by mechanically tenderized beef that was contaminated with E. coli 0157:H7.

Mechanical meat tenderizing, also known as meat needling, uses needles and blades to penetrate steak and roasts. It is a common practice that is used by meat processors, suppliers, retailers and restaurants on raw cuts of meat so that it's more tender after being cooked.

After the outbreak, Health Canada did a health risk assessment and found that mechanically tenderized beef, or MTB, is much more likely to be contaminated with E. coli 0157:H7 than beef that is not mechanically tenderized. The mechanical tenderizing process drives E. coli 0157:H7 on the surface of the meat into the centre making it harder to kill during cooking. To kill E. coli 0157:H7 in the center of the meat, higher temperatures must be used.

A consumer cannot tell by looking at a cut of beef whether or not it has been mechanically tenderized. The new federal labelling requirements identify mechanically tenderized beef (MTB) when it is offered for sale and provides easy and safe cooking instructions. By following the cooking instructions, the risk of getting sick from E. coli 0157:H7 is much lower.

## What Products Do these Requirements Apply To?

These requirements only apply to beef products that have been mechanically tenderized. The requirements apply to both fresh and frozen uncooked MTB, as well as both prepackaged and non-prepackaged uncooked MTB products.

These requirements DO NOT APPLY TO:

- Intact cuts of beef that have NOT BEEN mechanically tenderized.
- Ground beef.
- Other species' meat that has been mechanically tenderized such as pork, poultry, lamb, goat, other species.

## What are the New Requirements?

The new requirements are quite simple. The following statements (as shown exactly below in quotations) are required to be included on the label on the package containing the MTB:

**"Mechanically tenderized"**

**"Cook to a minimum internal temperature of 63°C (145°F)"**

And, in the case of steaks, an additional safe cooking instruction to help achieve a consistent temperature throughout, the following words must also be on the principal display panel:

**"Turn steak over at least twice during cooking".**

All these words must appear in a way that is as prominent as the other words on the label.

## What Businesses Do the New Labelling Requirements Apply To?

The new labelling requirements apply to all food businesses that sell MTB to other food businesses or to consumers in an uncooked, solid cut form. This includes, but is not limited to, meat processors, importers, grocery retailers, butcher shops, cut and wraps, and delis.

For MTB that is packaged on the premises at time of customer selection (e.g. in a butcher shop or at clerk-served meat counters), the MTB will need to be identified as being mechanically tenderized before the customer chooses their cut of beef. This means the words "mechanically tenderized" need to be on the in-store signs beside the product in the display case. If the operator chooses, the cooking instructions can also be displayed at this time; however, this is not required. But once the meat has been packaged to give to the customer, it is required that the package label has both the mandatory identification of "mechanically tenderized" and the safe cooking instructions (as above).

## What About Food Service Establishments?

The labelling aspects of these requirements do not apply to advertisements or to menu labeling in food service establishments (e.g., restaurants, school and hospital cafeterias, catering operations, etc.). However, these requirements will ensure that foodservice establishments that purchase uncooked MTB will receive products that are properly identified and labelled so they know the meat has been mechanically tenderized. The food service establishments will be expected to follow the safe cooking procedures and temperatures so that their customers can enjoy a safe meal.

## When are the New Labelling Requirements Mandatory?

The new labeling requirements will be mandatory beginning on August 21, 2014.

**If you have any further questions, please contact Food Protection Services at BCCDC or go to the following Health Canada link for their complete guidance document at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/legislation/guide-ld/mech-tenderized-beef-boeuf-attendris-meca-eng.php>**