



## Canadian Celiac Association

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## Notice about GF Cheerios

General Mills Canada announced last week that five Cheerios flavours sold in Canada will carry a gluten-free claim. Original Cheerios, Honey Nut Cheerios, Multi-Grain Cheerios, Apple Cinnamon Cheerios and Chocolate Cheerios will be rolled out across the country in August. The Canadian Celiac Association (CCA) held a conference call with representatives of General Mills Canada and General Mills US on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016 to discuss our concerns with the gluten-free label on these products.

## Recommendation

The Canadian Celiac Association (CCA) recommends that people with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity **DO NOT** consume the gluten-free labeled Cheerios products at this time because of concerns about the potential levels of gluten in boxes of these cereals. The CCA is receptive to evaluating any additional information that General Mills is willing to disclose.

## Why is the CCA concerned?

Oats are a naturally gluten-free grain; however, it has been documented that oats are frequently cross-contaminated with gluten-containing grains, especially barley and wheat. Health Canada scientists have tested commercial oat samples and found high levels of gluten contamination (note 1). Cross-contamination can occur because oats often are grown in rotation with other crops, harvested and transported with equipment that is also used for gluten-containing grains.

We know the following:

1. Oats are an extremely high risk grain and even “gluten-free oats” are at high risk for gluten contamination.
2. It is very difficult to remove gluten-containing grains from oats using optical and mechanical technology alone because barley and wheat are similar in size, shape and color as oats. Broken kernels present in the grain also add to the sorting challenge.
3. General Mills is using a cleaning system that they developed based on mechanical sorting to remove barley and wheat from regular commercial oats.
4. Gluten contamination in-oats is not distributed evenly through a batch; therefore, “hot spots” of high contamination can occur.

Based on the information provided to date, our scientific advisors are not convinced that the testing procedures described by General Mills are sufficient to detect these contamination “hot spots” in the

oats and oat flour or in the boxes of cereal that may contain those contaminated oats. As a result, some boxes of cereal in the market may be safe for people with celiac disease while others contain significant gluten contamination that has not been detected using current testing protocols.

The CCA is receptive to evaluating any additional information that General Mills is willing to disclose. Until then, the CCA stands by its advice that people with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity should not consume Cheerios products in spite of the gluten-free claim.

## **CCA's Position on the Safety of Oats**

The CCA relies on advice from our Professional Advisory Council (PAC) and other scientific experts for recommendations on the safety of oats for people with celiac disease. The PAC "Position statement on consumption of oats by individuals with celiac disease" indicates the need for evidence-based, peer-reviewed, published data that demonstrates the levels of gluten in oats that have been cleaned using mechanical and/or optical sorting procedures (Note 2).

There are three product brands currently on the market made with gluten-free oats that are manufactured in facilities certified by the CCA's Gluten-Free Certification Program (GFCP):

- Holy Crap Plus Gluten Free Oats
- Quaker Oats (several types)
- Nairn (several products)

These companies have demonstrated to independent parties, trained GFCP auditors and GFCP technical personnel, that both their processed oats and finished products meet Health Canada's standard for gluten free and are safe for individuals with celiac disease.

## **What if I eat Cheerios and have a problem?**

We realize that some people with celiac disease will decide to eat Cheerios. The CCA recommends that if you experience a reaction to the cereal, you should notify the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (MAPAQ in Quebec), General Mills Canada, the store that sold you the package and the CCA.

### **Canadian Food Inspection Agency (all provinces except Quebec)**

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/information-for-consumers/report-a-concern/contact-us/eng/1390269985112/1390346078752>

### **MAPAQ (Quebec only)**

<http://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Restauration/Qualitedesaliments/Pages/plaintes.aspx>

### **General Mills Customer Service**

<http://consumercontacts.generalmills.com/ConsolidatedContact.aspx?page=http://www.lifemadedelicious.ca&js=True&language=en>

### **Canadian Celiac Association**

Email ([info@celiac.ca](mailto:info@celiac.ca)) or Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/CCAceliac/>)

Please keep the remainder of the cereal package and any unopened boxes purchased at the same time until it is clear whether CFIA is interested in testing the package for gluten.

## **How do I help get the message out that “gluten free” must mean “safe for celiac disease”?**

This is an issue of significant concern to the Canadian Celiac Association.

1. Contact General Mills Canada Customer service and tell them that you would like to eat Cheerios, but not until you are sure the product is safe for people with celiac disease.  
<http://consumercontacts.generalmills.com/ConsolidatedContact.aspx?page=http://www.lifemadedelicious.ca&js=True&language=en>
2. Contact Health Canada (Bureau of Chemical Safety) and tell them that you want “gluten free” to mean “safe for people with celiac disease” so that you do not have figure out if the test protocols used by a particular manufacturer are adequate to detect gluten contamination. Please copy the CCA on your messages to Health Canada. <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/contact/fn-an/hpfb-dgpsa/bcs-bipc-eng.php>



### **Anne Wraggett**

President, Board of Directors  
Canadian Celiac Association

**P.S.** Has the CCA made a difference in the quality of your gluten-free life? You can help us continue to address food safety issues with a donation to the CCA at [www.celiac.ca/donate](http://www.celiac.ca/donate).

### **Notes:**

1. Health Canada study of oat levels in commercial oats available in Canada.  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3118497/>
2. Canadian Celiac Association Professional Advisory Council position statement on consumption of oats by individuals with celiac disease. [http://www.celiac.ca/?page\\_id=2831](http://www.celiac.ca/?page_id=2831)