

Senators ask the FDA to halt lab closings

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A bipartisan group of 20 U.S. senators is asking the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to suspend plans to consolidate laboratories.

"These labs form the backbone of FDA's work in ensuring the safety of food, medical equipment and cosmetics," the senators wrote to FDA Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach.

"The proposed consolidation would be a major shift in FDA structure and reach, and it should undergo congressional review before any changes are implemented," the senators wrote in the letter organized by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa.

The FDA might cut the number of its labs from 13 to possibly as few as four, basing its decision on budgetary problems. The agency intends to announce by April which labs it intends to close.

Those laboratories are located in the Seattle area; San Francisco; the Los Angeles area; Denver; Kansas City, Mo.; Jefferson, Ark.; Philadelphia; New York; Atlanta; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Detroit; the Boston area; and the Cincinnati area.

The president of the National Treasury Employees Union, Colleen Kelley, voiced support Tuesday for the senators from the union's more than 5,200 FDA employees.

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