

Get The Facts

Food Safety

Protecting Our Nation's Food Supply

The need to improve oversight of our nation's food supply has never been greater. Every year, food-borne illnesses in the United States cause **5,000 deaths, 325,000 hospitalizations and 76 million illnesses**, at a cost of billions of dollars.

Outbreaks of food-borne illness from contaminated food products, produce and infant formula regularly make the headlines. This year, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) initiated the largest food product recall in U.S. history, affecting over 4,000 peanut products. And in 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a massive recall of nearly 150 million pounds of beef.

Food safety is critical to maintaining the health of the American public. In many cases—such as those cited above—food-borne illnesses are easily prevented through proper handling and preparation. The American Public Health Association (APHA) fully supports measures to strengthen our food safety system and reduce these preventable illnesses.

Get the Facts on Food Safety

Americans Bear the Cost of Food-Borne Diseases

- The five most common food-borne pathogens are responsible for an estimated \$44 billion dollars a year in medical costs and losses in productivity.
- Food-borne illnesses can lead to secondary, long-term illnesses, including kidney failure from E. coli, and Guillain-Barré syndrome from campylobacter infections.
- Infants and young children, pregnant women, older adults and individuals with weakened immune systems—including people living with chronic diseases like HIV/AIDS, diabetes and cancer—are at greatest risk for food-borne illness.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that unknown microbes cause nearly 80% of all food-borne illnesses.



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Get the Facts on Food Safety

The Current Food Safety System is Inadequate

- More than a dozen U.S. federal agencies have jurisdiction to regulate food safety in some capacity, creating a fragmented system of oversight that lacks adequate coordination.
- FDA regulates two-thirds of the food products associated with outbreaks of food-borne illnesses, yet the agency receives only 38% of the total federal budget for food safety.
- On average, FDA has only enough resources to inspect produce, seafood or processed foods plants just once every five to 10 years.
- Additionally, states conduct over 80% of all food facility inspections, and local agencies inspect most retail and food service establishments. Many states rely on federal funding and technical support to continue these activities.
- Right now, FDA lacks authority to require food safety tests or issue recalls. Both are done strictly on a voluntary basis.
- Data-sharing limitations, incompatible data systems and inadequate coordination hinder CDC, state and local food-borne illness surveillance efforts.

Sources: FDA, USDA, Congressional Research Service, Government Accountability Office, Center for Science in the Public Interest, Food Safety Research Consortium

APHA Supports Comprehensive Food Safety Legislation

APHA is pleased that Congress is addressing food safety and supports comprehensive food safety legislation that includes these key priorities:

- **Providing grants and training to build state and local capacity for food-borne illness detection, surveillance, laboratories and response.** In addition, APHA supports increased funding for CDC to expand its food surveillance, investigation and laboratory capacity
- **Improving coordination across the federal, state and local governments and private institutions** for food system investigations, surveillance and response.
- **Expanding inspection capacity by fully funding FDA and providing grants to support adequate state and local capacity and training.** APHA also supports increasing FDA risk-based inspection frequencies to at least once per year for any food establishment.
- **Implementing food safety plans within food establishments**—requiring the regular testing of food and premises, records maintenance, and reporting of positive contaminant results.
- **Authorizing FDA to access records to trace the source and path of contaminated food,** and to order mandatory recalls of food when required.
- **Providing public education on food safety, proper food handling and contamination risks,** and furnishing technical assistance to small food establishments.
- **Imposing mandatory penalties for noncompliance** with food safety laws.



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