

# Food Safety: What CDC has done...what CDC is doing

Foodborne illness is a preventable and underreported public health problem. Reducing foodborne illness by 10% would keep about 5 million Americans from getting sick each year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides the vital link between illness in people and government regulatory agencies and food producers. Specifically, that “link” is the high-quality surveillance data CDC gathers that inform food safety policy and regulatory interventions.

## Recent efforts and collaborations to prevent foodborne illness include:

### Data gathering and investigations that saved lives

- Monitored 17–42 potential food poisoning clusters per week in 2010; investigated more than 200 multistate clusters; 14 led to recalls.
- Helped identify the source of Salmonella that led to the recall of half-billion eggs.
- Launched FOOD (Foodborne Outbreak Online Database) to give the public access to CDC’s database of foodborne outbreaks.

### First estimates of foodborne illness in more than a decade

- Defined the problem: Each year, 1 of 6 Americans get sick and 3,000 die of foodborne diseases.
- Directed future priorities and policy development, including developing better estimates of economic costs.

### New trends in foodborne illness identified by FoodNet (Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network)

- Good news—declines in 6 of the 7 pathogens it tracks as of 2009.
- Needs improvement—*Salmonella* decreased by only 10% since 1996.

### Labs that use DNA “fingerprinting” identify clusters of illnesses faster

- PulseNet, a network of laboratories in all 50 states and 82 countries, is often the first to detect an outbreak. Since 1996, PulseNet’s work has resulted in recalls of more than one-half billion pounds of contaminated food.

### Better networks to detect multistate outbreaks

- A new surveillance network has cut by more than half (21 to 11 days) the time between when a person becomes ill from eating contaminated food and when they are interviewed.

### Improved foodborne outbreak environmental assessments and training

- Expanded Epi-Ready, which has trained more than 2,200 public health professionals in 30 states in foodborne illness response.

National Center for Emerging & Zoonotic Infectious Diseases  
Division of Foodborne, Waterborne, and Environmental Diseases

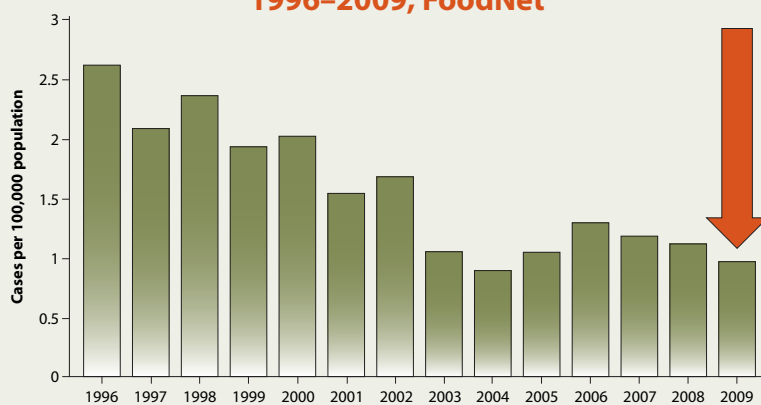


## Surveillance finds the culprit

What do ground beef, leafy greens, unpasteurized apple juice, and raw cookie dough have in common? They all have been associated with one of the most lethal, and now one of the best known foodborne pathogens—*E. coli*. Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (often shortened to STEC O157 or *E. coli* O157) captured media attention in the United States in the 1990s after outbreaks of infections caused widespread sickness and even death.

After CDC and its partners launched FoodNet in 1996, studies began linking sporadic cases of foodborne illness caused by *E. coli* to ground beef. When regulators and industry leaders started using CDC data to improve food handling and production standards, the incidence of *E. coli*-associated illness in foods such as ground beef, raw juice, and leafy greens rapidly declined. So much so that in 2009, the *Healthy People 2010* goal of reducing infections caused by *E. coli*, was reached 1 year early.

**Incidence rate of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections by year, 1996–2009, FoodNet**



*Preventing a single fatal case of *E. coli* O157 infection would save an estimated \$7 million.*

### **CDC goals for reducing foodborne illness in 2011:**

- Use surveillance data to link illness to specific foods and help our many partners target their prevention efforts.
- Test faster investigative strategies for multistate foodborne outbreaks.
- Decrease by 5% (from 2005–2007 levels) outbreaks caused by *Salmonella*.
- Collaborate with partners to implement the Food Safety Modernization Act and *Healthy People 2020* food safety goals.

