

The CDC says there s both good and bad news about foodborne illness

By ACSH Staff — May 18, 2015



A new [report](#) ^[1] from the CDC s FoodNet surveillance system

presents data about the frequency of foodborne illnesses in 2014, and compares it to those frequencies it found in 2006-2008. FoodNet is a system set up in 1995 to monitor the incidence of foodborne illnesses caused by 9 different pathogens. Only outbreaks confirmed by laboratory analyses are included. The system covers 10 geographic areas in the US, which include about 15 percent of the population.

The good news presented in the report is that there have been decreases in the occurrence of illnesses caused by *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Yersinia*. These bacteria can cause fatal infections as well as serious damage to the kidneys and other organs. On the other hand, the incidence of *Campylobacter* and *Vibrio* outbreaks have increased since the index years. In addition to the bacterial outbreaks listed below, FoodNet also collects data on norovirus, and the parasites *Cryptosporidium* and *Cyclospora*.

The report notes that now pathogens can be identified more rapidly based on DNA testing, thus scientists no longer have to wait for bacteria to be grown in cultures in order to identify them. This fact helps speed the withdrawal of contaminated foods from the market, and is at least partly responsible for the decreases in some types of illnesses. However, the increased incidences of *Campylobacter* and some types of *Salmonella* are still causes of concern. These bacteria are often associated with poultry, and to a lesser extent with beef.

ACSH s Dr. Ruth Kava had this to say The downward trends in *E. coli* O157 and *Yersinia* infections are really good news. *E. coli* O157 in particular can result in permanent kidney damage and death. However, as the report points out, more must be done to decrease outbreaks of the other pathogens especially at the sources of the contaminated foods. It s a shame that [food irradiation](#) ^[2] has not been widely implemented, since it can certainly diminish the threat of bacterial contamination. Until that is accomplished, consumers must be careful to handle raw foods in a sanitary manner. Information about proper food handling can be found in our publication on Foodborne Illness available [here](#). ^[3]

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2015/05/18/the-cdc-says-theres-both-good-and-bad-news-about-foodborne-illness>

Links

[1] http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6418a4.htm?s_cid=mm6418a4_w

[2] <http://acsh.org/2003/05/irradiated-foods-2/>

[3] <http://acsh.org/1999/06/eating-safely-avoiding-foodborne-illness-second-edition/>