

FDA NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: Oct. 22, 2010

Media Inquiries: Pat El-Hinnawy, 301-796-4763, patricia.el-hinnawy@fda.hhs.gov

Consumer Inquiries: 888-INFO-FDA

FDA Heightens Focus on Retail Food Safety *10-Year Tracking Report Highlights Areas for Improvement*

The Food and Drug Administration called today for stepped up efforts to improve food safety practices in retail food establishments, specifically pointing to the need for the presence of certified food safety managers to oversee safety practices. FDA pledged to work closely with state and local governments and operators of restaurants, grocery stores and other food service establishments to prevent illness from contaminated food.

FDA Deputy Commissioner for Foods Michael R. Taylor cited the retail food industry's recent progress in key areas as well as room for improvement, based on the findings released today from FDA's 10-year study tracking the retail industry's efforts to reduce five key risk factors.

"In looking at the data, it is quite clear that having a certified food protection manager on the job makes a difference," Taylor said. "Some states and localities require certified food protection managers already, and many in the retail industry employ them voluntarily as a matter of good practice. We think it should become common practice."

A component of the 10-year study, the 2009 retail food report, found that the presence of a certified food protection manager in four facility types was correlated with statistically significant higher compliance levels with food safety practices and behaviors than in facilities lacking a certified manager. For instance, compliance in full service restaurants was 70 percent with a manager, versus 58 percent without a manager. In delicatessens, compliance was 79 percent with a manager, versus 64 percent without. For seafood markets, compliance with a manager was 88 percent, versus 82 percent without. And in produce markets, compliance was 86 percent with a manager, versus 79 percent without.

In addition to calling for certified food protection managers to be common practice, Taylor said the FDA initiative will include:

Increased efforts to encourage widespread, uniform and complete adoption of the FDA Model Food Code by state, local and tribal regulatory agencies that are responsible for retail food safety standard setting and inspection. The Food Code recommends standards for management and personnel, food operations and equipment and facilities;

Increased efforts for adoption of FDA's National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards by state, local and tribal agencies that enforce the Food Code and other measures to create an enhanced local regulatory environment for retail food operations.

"The key to food safety is prevention at every step from farm to table. Food retail managers, like growers and processors, have a responsibility to reduce the risk of foodborne illness," Taylor said.

“We want to build on past progress through continued collaboration with the retail industry and strengthened partnerships with state, local and tribal agencies in their standard-setting and compliance efforts.”

The 10-year study looked at more than 800 retail food establishments in 1998, 2003 and 2008 and five risk factors: food from unsafe sources, poor personal hygiene, inadequate cooking, improper holding of food (time and temperature), and contaminated food surfaces and equipment.

FDA found that overall compliance improved in all nine categories of establishments. The improvements were statistically significant in elementary schools, fast food restaurants, full-service restaurants, meat and poultry markets and departments, and produce markets and departments. Improvements, although not statistically significant, were seen in hospitals, nursing homes, deli departments/stores and seafood markets and departments.

However, according to FDA, continued improvements are needed across the board, in regard to three risk factors: poor personal hygiene, improper holding of food, and contaminated food surfaces and equipment.

More than 3,000 state, local and tribal agencies have primary responsibility to regulate the more than 1 million food establishments in the United States. FDA assists the regulatory agencies and the retail industry through the Food Code, which contains prevention-oriented and science-based food safety guidance, training, program evaluation and technical assistance.

For more information:

FDA Trend Analysis Report (1998-2008)

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodborneIllnessandRiskFactorReduction/RetailFoodRiskFactorStudies/ucm223293.htm>

2009 FDA Report

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodborneIllnessandRiskFactorReduction/RetailFoodRiskFactorStudies/ucm224321.htm>

Backgrounder: FDA Retail Food Risk Factor Study

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodborneIllnessandRiskFactorReduction/RetailFoodRiskFactorStudies/ucm230313.htm>

Backgrounder: FDA Retail Food Safety Initiative

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodborneIllnessandRiskFactorReduction/RetailFoodRiskFactorStudies/ucm230315.htm>

FDA Food Code

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/FoodCode2009/default.htm>

FDA National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/ProgramStandards/ucm180269.htm>

Ensuring Food Safety: The Cooperative Retail Food Program

<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm223441.htm>

Ensuring Food Safety: The Cooperative Retail Food Program (photo slideshow)

<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm230343.htm>