

News Release

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Obama administration releases food safety tips, new report on efforts to protect consumers from foodborne illness

In preparation for the holiday season, Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today issued a progress report highlighting the accomplishments and strategies of President Obama's Food Safety Working Group (FSWG) combined with useful information for consumers on safe food handling. The interagency group, chaired by Sebelius and Vilsack, was established in 2009 to advise the President on how to strengthen the U.S. food safety system for the 21st century through a coordinated federal agency approach.

“ As families across the country share in this holiday season, it is important to reiterate our commitment to protecting the food supply and our desire to remain vigilant to protect the American people,” said Secretary Vilsack. “ We have taken a number of steps to improve the safety of America's meat and poultry supply in recent years and the President's Food Safety Working Group has proven to be a vital component to our work.”

“ When we gather around our holiday tables, we shouldn't ever have to worry about the safety of our food,” said Secretary Sebelius. “ We have the safest food supply in the world, but we can always do more to protect consumers. The best way to ensure food safety is by building prevention into our food safety system, and we will take another step in that direction when the FDA Food and Drug Administration issues proposed rules under the Food Safety Modernization Act.”

Using a three dimensional approach of prevention, surveillance and response, the FSWG has provided for increased coordination and collaboration between the federal agencies

responsible for food safety enforcement. FSWG member departments and agencies share information and experience about all aspects of food safety which strengthens the scientific and technical infrastructure to support a modern food safety system.

By clarifying responsibilities and improving accountability, the FSWG has already made great strides to strengthen the nation's food safety system. For instance, the FDA implemented the Egg Safety Rule in 2010, which is expected to prevent 79,000 illnesses associated with eating raw or undercooked eggs and save \$1 billion each year. In addition, the FDA, in partnership with USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, established a Produce Safety Alliance at Cornell University to develop educational and training materials for growers of all sizes. And just this week, the FDA announced the creation of the Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance (FSPCA) to develop training courses and materials on preventing food contamination for both people and animals during production.

The report also highlights CDC's most comprehensive estimates of foodborne illness since 1999. CDC provided another important piece to the interagency group's efforts by making sure that policies aimed at reducing infections work. Its June Vital Signs report pointed to success in reducing E. coli by almost half. Moving forward, CDC's seven FoodCORE sites are aggressively conducting outbreak investigations in partnership with public health laboratories and environmental health specialists.

The FSWG report released today also chronicles efforts made over the three years by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) to safeguard the food supply and provide consumers with clear information about the foods they purchase. FSIS set new standards for poultry establishments which may prevent as many as 25,000 foodborne illnesses annually. Further, the Department announced a zero tolerance policy for six additional strains of Shiga toxin-producing E. coli (STEC) which will launch in 2012 and a new "test and hold" policy that requires facilities to hold product until microbiological testing can determine it is safe to release into commerce.

The FSWG's accomplishments to date represent efforts toward a stronger food safety system that will deliver greater value, better prevent illnesses, and more effectively promote the well-being of the American people. The FSWG also focused on consumer education by creating a centralized information source at FoodSafety.gov. The site offers information on ways to prevent foodborne illness, current food recalls, and how to keep food safe, especially around the holidays.

Building on those achievements, the FSWG will continue to strengthen the food safety system through increased prevention, enhanced surveillance, and faster response.

The FSWG also plans to continue its efforts to improve food safety by collaborating more with state and local health and agriculture agencies, and food producers, as well as providing education to consumers. Fostering outreach and maintaining strong partnerships at the state and local levels will further sustain and enhance our food system.

Find more information on how to keep food safe at [FoodSafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)

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