

Report Card on Food Safety

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[Susan Aydlotte] Welcome to this CDC podcast on food safety. I'm your host, Susan Aydlotte. Each year, the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, or FoodNet, publishes an annual "Report Card on Food Safety" in CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. This report card provides important information on trends in foodborne disease in the United States. This year's FoodNet report was just published, and today, we're talking with one of the authors of the report, Dr. Casey Barton Behravesh. Dr. Barton is a research scientist with FoodNet in the CDC's National Center for Zoonotic, Vector-Borne, and Enteric Diseases. Dr. Barton, welcome to the show.

[Dr. Barton] Thank you, Susan. I'm happy to be here.

[Susan Aydlotte] Dr. Barton, can you tell us a little about FoodNet?

[Dr. Barton] Sure Susan. FoodNet is a collaborative network of 10 state health departments, CDC's Emerging Infections Program, and two food regulatory agencies, which are the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The FoodNet sites cover a population of 45 million people, which is about 15 percent of the U.S. population. Since 1996, FoodNet has tracked the number of infections caused by nine different pathogens or germs that are commonly spread through food, such as *Salmonella* or *E. coli* O157.

[Susan Aydlotte] What do the new FoodNet results from 2007 tell us, compared to previous years?

[Dr. Barton] Well, we're still seeing a lot of foodborne illness, especially in recent years. This tells us that there is still a lot more work that needs to be done to improve food safety in this country.

[Susan Aydlotte] This report states that *Salmonella* is the most common problem spread by contaminated food. I just heard about an outbreak of *Salmonella* caused by frozen pot pies. How is it spread, and can you tell us about the number of *Salmonella* infections?

[Dr. Barton] *Salmonella* was the most common bacterial germ reported to FoodNet in 2007, and the number of cases caused by *Salmonella* hasn't changed much in recent years. This germ is carried in the intestines of most types of food animals, including chickens, cattle, and pigs. The transmission of *Salmonella* from animals to humans can occur in many different ways. People can become infected if they eat contaminated food animal products, such as meat and eggs, or if they consume raw produce or water that's been contaminated by animal waste. People can also become infected if they come into direct contact with animals or their environment and don't wash their hands afterwards.

[Susan Aydlotte] I understand that *E. coli* O157 can cause serious illness, including bloody diarrhea. That can be scary.

[Dr. Barton] The rate of *E. coli* O157 infections went down in 2003 and 2004, but has since gone up. This really worries us because this germ causes severe illness and it can cause a serious complication called hemolytic uremic syndrome or HUS in which the kidneys fail. This can be especially serious in young children.

[Susan Aydlotte] Why are we seeing more of this?

[Dr. Barton] We don't fully understand the reasons for these recent increases. We know that *E. coli* O157 lives in the intestines of healthy cattle. There's evidence that ground beef is safer now than it was five years ago, but it is still an important source of these illnesses. *E. coli* O157 from cattle ranches can get into the environment and can contaminate other animals; plant crops, such as leafy greens like lettuce and spinach; and even water supplies.

[Susan Aydlotte] What can we do to protect ourselves?

[Dr. Barton] Susan, there are some things people can do to reduce their risks. They can purchase foods that have been processed for food safety, like pasteurized milk. Avoid the consumption of raw or undercooked foods including oysters, eggs, ground beef, and poultry, and also, always wash hands thoroughly after contact with raw meat, animals, animal products, or animal environments. It's important to know how to correctly wash your hands. You should first wet your hands with running water. Then, use lots of soap and rub the hands together to create a lather; the lather is really important. You need to scrub your hands vigorously for about 20 seconds, or the amount of time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice. Then you rinse all the soap off under running water, and you dry your hands on a disposable paper towel, not on your clothes. Also, adults should always help children wash their hands.

[Susan Aydlotte] Dr. Barton, that's quite a list. Is there a place where our listeners can get more information on this topic?

[Dr. Barton] To get more information on ways to protect your health and the health of your family, as well as information about FoodNet and other food safety topics, you can call 1-800-CDC-INFO or go to the CDC web site at www.cdc.gov.

[Susan Aydlotte] Thanks so much for taking the time to talk with us today Dr. Barton.

[Dr. Barton] Thanks very much for inviting me, Susan. It was a pleasure to be here.

For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.