



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Preventing Foodborne Illnesses

Preliminary FoodNet Data on the Incidence of Infection with Pathogens Transmitted Commonly Through Food — 10 States, 2009

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Millions of people get sick every year from contaminated food. In 2009, cases of *Shigella* and *E. Coli* infection declined, while cases of other common foodborne illnesses, such as *Salmonella* and *Listeria* infection, remained stable.

Dr. Barbara Mahon is a medical epidemiologist with CDC's Division of Foodborne, Bacterial, and Mycotic Diseases. She's joining us today to discuss ways to prevent foodborne illness. Welcome to the show, Barbara.

[Dr. Mahon] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Barbara, what are the trends in foodborne illness in the United States?

[Dr. Mahon] Over the past 10 to 15 years that we've been tracking many serious bacterial foodborne illnesses, we've seen that many of them have decreased, but most of the declines occurred before 2004. Over the past couple of years, we've seen some improvement in *Shigella* infections and in the number of infections caused by *E. coli* O157, a particularly serious kind of *E. Coli*. But we haven't seen improvements in the other infections that we track, so there's still a lot of room for improvement. You can find more information on these trends at our website: www.cdc.gov/foodnet.

[Dr. Gaynes] Which groups are most affected by foodborne illness?

[Dr. Mahon] Infants and young children are the age group that are most likely to be diagnosed with a foodborne infection, but once people have a foodborne infection, the group that's most likely to get severe illness, to be hospitalized, or to die is older adults.

[Dr. Gaynes] Barbara, how do foods become contaminated?

[Dr. Mahon] The production of food is an incredibly complex process. Most of the bacteria that cause the serious infections that we track have their natural reservoir, their natural environment, in the intestines of animals; but along the path of production, from the farm to processing, packaging, transportation, production, and ultimately preparation of food, there are many different places where the food can become contaminated.

[Dr. Gaynes] What is being done to prevent contamination of our food?

[Dr. Mahon] There are many good practices that have already been put into place by our federal regulatory authorities and by food producers. Many food producers are very committed to improving the safety of the food that they produce. Meat inspection is an example of a practice that has been in place for a long time and it's made a big difference. And there's newer practices for production of things like chicken or tomatoes, leafy greens, melons that promise to continue to improve the safety of food. In fact, we think that some of these newer practices may be responsible for some of the declines that we've seen in cases of foodborne illness in recent years. But again, there's still a lot of room for improvement and everyone needs to work together to make food even safer

[Dr. Gaynes] What can the consumer do to prevent foodborne illness?

[Dr. Mahon] It's really important to follow safe food handling and preparation guidelines. There's an excellent website at www.foodsafety.gov that explains how to prepare and store food safely.

Probably one of the most important things that consumers can do is to wash their hands thoroughly after touching raw meat or any other raw food product that comes from an animal.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Barbara. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Barbara Mahon about ways to prevent foodborne illness.

Remember: Wash your hands often, store food properly, thoroughly cook meat, and wash fruits and vegetables to help remove dangerous bacteria and prevent potentially serious illnesses.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

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