

Getting the Facts on Foodborne Illness

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that foodborne diseases cause approximately 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths in the United States each year.
- Foodborne illness costs the U.S. economy between \$5 billion and \$22 billion each year in lost productivity, hospitalization, long-term disability and even death.
- Half of all foodborne outbreaks reported to the CDC have no identifiable cause. However, while over 200 known diseases can be transmitted through food, most of the outbreaks are due to microorganisms in food. Approximately 30 pathogenic agents have been implicated in foodborne disease cases or outbreaks with significant frequency.
- The CDC lists four sources of foodborne illness: disease-causing bacteria, viruses, parasites and toxins. A few of these are very common and account for the majority of reported illness cases.
- Three pathogens – *Salmonella* (nontyphoidal), *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Toxoplasma gondii* -- are responsible for an estimated 1,500 deaths per year.
- Unknown agents account for the remaining 62 million illnesses 265,000 hospitalizations and 3,200 deaths.
- Since 1982, *E. coli* 0157:H7 has emerged as an important cause of foodborne illness. Because many laboratories do not routinely test for it, the actual number of illnesses caused by *E. coli* is unknown, but the CDC estimates this pathogen causes approximately 62,000 illnesses annually.
- Each year, an estimated 2,500 persons become seriously ill from *Listeria monocytogenes*. This disease primarily affects pregnant women, newborns, the elderly and adults with weakened immune systems. While the estimated percent of foodborne disease due to *Listeria monocytogenes* is less than 1 percent, nearly 30 percent of recorded deaths are attributed to this organism.
- While the likelihood of serious complications is unknown, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates that approximately 2 to 3 percent of all foodborne illness cases lead to secondary long-term illnesses.

- Norwalk-like viruses may account for over 60 percent of foodborne illness cases in the United States. This estimate may be low due to difficulty in identifying the virus and frequency of sporadic cases.
- *Campylobacter* infections account for an estimated 14.2 percent of all foodborne illness and nearly 50 percent of those caused by bacteria.