



Consumer Federation of America

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**CDC Report Shows Some Success, but Most Progress on
Reducing Foodborne Illness Remains Stalled**
*Government Failed to Meet Goal for Reducing Listeria
for Fifth Year in a Row*

The report on the incidence of foodborne illness in the United States during 2009, released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention today, reveals that the federal government has made some progress in reducing illnesses from *E. coli* O157:H7, but that progress remains stalled on reducing illnesses from other pathogens.

The CDC reported that the government has met the National Health Objectives of one case per 100,000 for reducing illnesses from *E. coli* O157:H7. The CDC found that the incidence of *E. coli* O157:H7 in 2009 was 0.99 cases per 100,000. This is good news; however it must be greeted with caution. The government has previously met the National Health Objectives for *E. coli* O157:H7 in 2004, only to see the incidence increase and remain elevated for four years. CFA hopes that the government and the industry will be appropriately modest about this news until this type of performance can be achieved year after year. It will take sustained and dedicated effort in order to maintain this recent success.

Unfortunately, for illnesses from Salmonella, Campylobacter, and Listeria, the song remains the same. Salmonella infections declined slightly to 15.19 cases per 100,000, but are still over twice the National Health Objective of 6.8 cases per 100,000. The incidence of Campylobacter has remained nearly the same since 2002 and in fact increased slightly this year to 13.02 cases per 100,000. There has been no meaningful change for illnesses from these two pathogens when compared with the previous three year period.

Salmonella and Campylobacter illnesses are frequently associated with consumption of raw or undercooked poultry. In order to reduce the contamination of poultry during processing, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service has developed new baseline studies and new performance standards for reducing Salmonella and Campylobacter. These standards could help reduce the level of contamination of poultry that reaches consumers, but USDA has inexplicably delayed their release for over a year. These standards should be released and implemented immediately.

For the fifth year in a row, the government has failed to meet the 2005 National Health Objective for reducing Listeria-related illnesses. This pathogen, which is responsible for the highest percentage of hospitalizations and deaths among the pathogens covered, is associated with ready-to-eat meat and poultry products and unpasteurized cheeses. If contracted by a pregnant woman, Listeria usually results in a miscarriage or stillbirth.

In May 2000 after the notorious BallPark Franks Listeria outbreak, President Clinton declared that Listeria needed special attention and set the goal of reducing the rate of illnesses to 0.25 per hundred thousand by 2005. The government has failed to meet that goal for five years now. And, according to CDC data, the incidence rate for 2009 of 0.34 cases per 100,000 is at its highest rate since 1999.

With one year left, the nation is well short of meeting its goals for improved health and disease reduction published in the government's primary health plan, *Healthy People 2010*. As a result, consumers remain at serious risk of foodborne illness or death from contaminated food. The Obama Administration and Congress must provide the Food and Drug Administration and the Food Safety and Inspection Service with the legal power and financial resources necessary to keep pathogens out of our food.

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Consumer Federation of America is a non-profit association of 300 consumer groups, representing more than 50 million Americans. It was established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, education and advocacy. The Food Policy Institute at CFA works to promote a safer, healthier and more affordable food supply.