



**Consumer Federation of America**

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**STATEMENT OF CFA's CAROL TUCKER-FOREMAN  
2007 CDC FOODNET DATA SHOWS SEVEN YEARS OF FAILURE  
AND THOUSANDS OF UNCESSARY DEATHS**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control report on foodborne illness rates for seven pathogens in 2007 looks depressingly like the reports for the last six years.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. is no closer to reducing the toll of foodborne illness today than it was in 2001. Graphs portraying the record show a flat line stalled far above the National Health Objectives.<sup>2</sup> Even the CDC acknowledges little or no progress since 2001 in combating illnesses caused by these pathogens.

Food contaminated with disease-causing bacteria are still causing 76 million illnesses in the U.S. each year, sending 325,000 Americans to the hospital and killing 5,000, mostly young children, the elderly and those with chronic illnesses.

The record discredits U.S. Department of Agriculture claims that its programs are controlling foodborne disease caused by meat and poultry products and highlights the FDA's failure to commit resources to food inspection. It stands in stark contrast to the progress against food poisoning from 1996 through 2001.

Comparing the Records: 1996-1998 through 2001 vs. 2001 through 2007

Between 1996 and 1998, the CDC's baseline years for measuring progress against foodborne disease, and 2001, the *Listeria* rate dropped almost 39%, *Campylobacter* dropped 36% and *E. coli O157:H7* cases declined 30%. The *Salmonella* rate went up 11%.

Between 2001 and 2007 the *Campylobacter* rate declined only 7%. The *E. coli O157:H7* rate dropped 25%. It remains 16% above the National Health Objective for 2010. Last year the CDC acknowledged that there has been virtually no change in the rate of *Campylobacter* since 2001.

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<sup>1</sup> CDC, Preliminary FoodNet Data on the Incidence of Infection with Pathogens Transmitted Commonly Through Foods—10 States, 2007, *Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report*, April 11, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, published as *Healthy People, 2010*.

The 2007 *Salmonella* rate, 14.92 cases per hundred thousand population, is higher than the 1996-1998 baseline of 13.5 cases and remains twice the rate of the National Health Objective.

These rates contradict the claims of government officials that we are making great progress in reducing foodborne illness. They fail to note that there has been little or no change since they have been responsible for protecting the public.

The failure to control *Listeria monocytogenes* food poisoning epitomizes this Administration's callous disregard for public health while it favors food companies. *Listeria* food poisoning has the highest hospitalization rate and highest mortality rate of any bacterial foodborne infection. The death rate is higher than for *E. coli* O157:H7. If contracted by a pregnant woman, *Listeriosis* almost always results in miscarriage or stillbirth.

The illnesses from this pathogen are so serious that, in 2000, President Clinton moved forward the goal of reducing *Listeria* related foodborne illness to 2.5 cases per million to 2005. This year is the third year in a row that the government failed to meet the objective. The Bush Administration refuses to acknowledge this failure to meet the Presidential directive.

In addition, despite the continued high rate of *Listeria* cases, neither the USDA nor the U.S. Food and Drug Administration are taking steps to prevent the illness. The most common vector for *Listeriosis* is ready-to-eat meat and poultry deli products such as bologna. These products say "cooked" and "ready-to-eat" on the label. For pregnant women and people who are immune suppressed this label may be fatally misleading. The Department's own education material states that pregnant women and immune suppressed people should reheat the products to kill *Listeria* bacteria but the USDA continues to reject consumer pleas to put this vital information on the label where it can be seen at the crucial time.

The FDA's record on controlling *Listeria* which also occurs in fish salads, deli salads and soft cheese is even less attuned to public needs and more sensitive to industry pleas for regulatory relief. Responding to an industry petition, the FDA recently proposed to end the zero tolerance for *Listeria* in many of the foods it regulates. The FDA excuses its actions as "harmonizing" U.S. policy with the European nations that have lowered the standard.

Americans will continue to suffer unnecessarily from food poisoning until the President of the U.S. makes a commitment to reducing the toll, enlists support from the Congress for improved funding and resources for the FDA, and directs both the FDA and the FSIS to put public health and safety above the economic interests of food processors.

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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.

