



Consumer Federation of America

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Progress in Reducing Foodborne Illness Stalled, According to New Data from CDC

The [annual report](#) on the incidence of foodborne illness in the United States, released today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, revealed progress continues to remain stalled on reducing illnesses from the major foodborne pathogens.

Preliminary data from the CDC for 2012 reveals statistically significant increases since 2006-2008 for illnesses from *Campylobacter* and *Vibrio*, and virtually no change for illnesses from *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella*, *E. coli* O157:H7 and other shiga-toxin producing strains of *E. coli* (non-O157 STECs). The data demonstrate a need for greater vigilance in efforts to reduce illnesses from these pathogens.

For the second year in a row, the incidence of illnesses from non-O157 STECs (1.16 cases/100,000 population) is higher than illnesses from *E. coli* O157:H7 (1.12/100,000). The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service declared six strains of non-O157 STECs as adulterants in beef trim in 2012 and began testing for these strains, an important step to help reduce the risk of these pathogens in ground beef.

After several years of remaining under 1.0 cases per 100,000, the incidence of illnesses from *E. coli* O157:H7 increased to 1.12 cases per 100,000 which is the same incidence as in 2008. It is too early to know whether this represents an upward trend or whether it is simply a slight variation in the data. Very little progress has been seen on *Listeria* illnesses, which are at 0.25 cases per 100,000.

According to the CDC, *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* were the most frequent sources of infection in 2012. *Salmonella* illnesses are nearly the same as last year at 16.42 cases per 100,000. There has been almost no progress in reducing illnesses from *Salmonella* since 1996, when CDC first began conducting surveillance on the pathogen. CDC notes that illnesses from *Campylobacter* increased 14% since 2006-2008. *Campylobacter* illnesses are at 14.30 cases per 100,000 population. We have seen little progress on reducing illnesses from *Campylobacter* since 2001.

Salmonella and *Campylobacter* illnesses are frequently associated with raw or undercooked poultry. Much of the poultry that consumers purchase in the supermarket is sold as parts, yet the Food Safety and Inspection Service has only collected data on whole birds, not on the level of contamination of poultry parts. The agency is in the midst of a study of poultry parts, but has not yet published any data. Additionally, whole birds purchased at retail and tested by [consumer groups](#) have shown unacceptably high rates of *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*.

The lack of progress in reducing illnesses from these pathogens is particularly concerning as the Food Safety and Inspection Service is seeking to implement a new inspection program for poultry, yet the agency has almost no data on how the proposed program will actually affect Campylobacter rates on poultry. The agency's proposal also does not require poultry plants to test for Salmonella and Campylobacter, significantly limiting the agency's ability to assure that poultry plants are reducing contamination from these pathogens.

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Consumer Federation of America is a nonprofit association of nearly 300 consumer organizations founded in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, education and advocacy.