

HOW SAFE IS YOUR FOOD?

World Health Day 2015

From farm to plate,
make food **safe**



World Health
Organization

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean



FOOD SAFETY

- Safe food underpins sustainable life and promotes good health.
- Food may be unsafe due to contents of harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemical substances.
- Unsafe food is known to cause more than 200 diseases, ranging from diarrhoea to various forms of cancer.
- Unsafe food impedes socioeconomic development by straining health care systems and harming national economies, tourism and trade.
- A comprehensive 'Farm to fork approach' spanning the entire food chain from primary producer to consumer is the most effective way known to control foodborne disease.
- Food supply chains often stretch over many food businesses and cross multiple national borders before reaching the final consumer. Effective collaboration between governments, food businesses, consumers and health systems helps to ensure safe food.

Achieving a safe food chain requires dedicated actions from a range of different stakeholders. This factsheet provides an overview of some of the required components of a strong food safety system.

Policy-makers and food safety authorities

- Build and maintain adequate food safety systems and infrastructures (e.g. laboratories) to respond to and manage food safety risks along the entire food chain, including during emergencies.
- Integrate food safety into broader food policies and programmes, such as nutrition and food security.
- Update food safety legislation to meet the evolving risks from the food sector.
- Foster multisectoral collaboration among public health, animal health, agriculture and other sectors for better communication and effective joint action.
- Link surveillance of foodborne disease, including outbreaks, to food sector data and use the combined data for preventive action.
- Participate in and use international coordination and cooperation mechanisms, such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission established by the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, to achieve a high, consistent and harmonized level of food safety.

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Primary producers

- Application of good agricultural practices is key to safe primary food production in both agricultural and animal sectors.
- Use safe water, feed, fertilizers and other farm inputs.
- Use clean harvesting tools and machinery and packaging materials.
- Store food crops in areas and containers protected from pests and growth of undesirable microorganisms.
- Treat diseased farm animals in consultation with a veterinarian.

Food industry

- Apply food safety systems, such as hazard analysis and critical control points, to manage food safety risks.
- Source raw materials from primary producers using good agricultural practices.
- Monitor safety of raw materials and final products and react promptly when hazards are identified.
- Establish and maintain systems to recall products from the market in case they are found hazardous.
- Promote a 'food safety culture' among staff and provide adequate food safety training.
- Label packaged foods clearly so retailers and consumers will be well informed.

Transport companies

- Prevent contamination by keeping food items away from non-food items.
- Prevent contamination by keeping different food categories separate.
- Use food transport containers for food items only.
- Clean transport and containers before using them for food if they are soiled or have been used for non-food purposes.
- Keep chilled food chilled and frozen food frozen.
- React to and report incidents in which food items may have been abused or contaminated.

Food retailers

- Use the 'first in, first out' principle for optimal stock rotation.
- Maintain cold chain for chilled and frozen food items.
- Separate food items from non-food items.



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- Avoid cross-contamination from unsafe food raw materials to ready-to-eat food items.
- Keep facilities clean and free from pests.
- Provide hygienic hand-wash (clean water, soap and towels), toilet and cleaning facilities for staff.

Consumers and food service sector

- Knowledge of good hygienic practices is key to safe food preparation, handling and storage at home, as well as in food outlets and restaurants.
- While food producers have the main responsibility for providing safe food, consumers can protect themselves and their families through handling and preparing food safely, practising the WHO Five Keys to Safer Food.
- Read, understand and follow the directions put on labels of packaged food by food producers.
- Do not consider diarrhoea a “fact of life”.
- Do not self medicate. Seek medical attention if you experience signs of foodborne disease, such as diarrhoea.

Health care systems

- Doctors should be alert to patients seeking medical care for foodborne illness.
- Doctors should verify diagnosis by requesting specimens from patients and having them analysed in a reliable laboratory.
- When a laboratory identifies cause of disease the information should be used both to focus patient treatment and for reporting to the health authority through available surveillance systems.
- The health authority should collate and analyse reports of outbreaks of foodborne disease and examine trends of foodborne illness. The information collected can be used to protect public health through initiating preventive action, in collaboration with food safety authorities and food producers.
- Integrate foodborne disease surveillance into the general disease surveillance system.

