



Safe Food for a Healthy Life

An Initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts at Georgetown University

Produce-Related Foodborne-Illness Outbreaks

- From 1990 through 2005, at least 713 produce-related outbreaks have occurred.¹
- From 1996 to 2007 there were approximately 72 reported outbreaks of foodborne illness associated with roughly 20 fresh produce commodities, both domestic and imported. Of this total, 13 outbreaks were associated with tomatoes, 11 outbreaks were associated with melons, and 24 outbreaks were associated with leafy greens such as lettuce and spinach.²
- In the 1990s, at least 12 percent of all foodborne-outbreak-associated illnesses implicated fresh fruits and vegetables.³
- Between 1996 and 2004, FDA responded to 14 outbreaks of foodborne illness for which fresh lettuce or fresh tomatoes were the confirmed or suspected vehicle. These outbreaks account for approximately 859 reported cases of illness.⁴
- Since 1990, more than 3,000 Americans have become ill from 24 known tomato outbreaks⁵
- Between 1995 and 2005, there were 19 outbreaks of foodborne illness caused by *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 for which fresh or fresh-cut lettuce or spinach was implicated as the outbreak vehicle. In one additional case, fresh-cut spinach was implicated. These 19 outbreaks account for approximately 409 reported cases of illness and two deaths.⁶
- More illness results from each produce outbreak (an average of 48 cases) than from the average outbreak associated with poultry (30 cases), beef (27 cases), or seafood (10 cases).⁷

¹ Carolyn Smith DeWaal and Farida Bhuiya, *Outbreaks by the Numbers: Fruits and Vegetables 1990-2005*, Center for Science and the Public Interest, 5, <http://www.cspinet.org/foodsafety/IAFPPoster.pdf>.

² "Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables"; Request for Comments and Scientific Data and Information, Docket No. FDA-2008-N-0455, *Federal Register*, 73, no 170: 51306-51309 (September 2, 2008), <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/pdf/E8-20187.pdf>.

³ HHS, FDA CFSAN, Office of Plant and Dairy Foods, *Produce Safety From Production to Consumption: 2004 Action Plan to Minimize Foodborne Illness Associated with Fresh Produce Consumption* (2004), <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/prodpla2.html>.

⁴ HHS, FDA CFSAN, Office of Plant and Dairy Foods, *Letter To Firms that Grow, Pack, or Ship Fresh Lettuce and Fresh Tomatoes*(2004), <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/prodltr.html>.



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⁵ Sarah Klein, *FDA Inaction to Blame for Salmonella Outbreak*, Press release (June 10, 2008)

<http://www.cspinet.org/new/200806101.html>.

⁶ HHS, FDA CFSAN, Office of Plant and Dairy Foods, *Letter to California Firms that Grow, Pack, Process, or Ship Fresh and Fresh-cut Lettuce* (2005), <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/prodltr2.html>.

⁷ Carolyn Smith DeWaal, Testifying before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, *Import Inspection Failures and What Must Be Done*, 110th Cong. 2nd sess., July 17, 2007.

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