



International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN)

What is the issue?

The rapid globalization of food production and trade has increased the likelihood of international incidents involving contaminated food.

Food safety authorities all over the world have acknowledged that ensuring food safety must be tackled not only at the national level, but also through closer linkages between food safety authorities internationally. Such linkages are important for exchanging routine information on food safety issues, and in order to facilitate rapid access to information during food safety emergencies.

The management of food-related health events in-country is rarely the responsibility of a single agency or organization, making the management of food safety incidents more complex. An intersectoral approach is therefore needed at every level to ensure coordination and swift response in the case of an emergency.

What is WHO doing?

In 2004 WHO launched the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). INFOSAN is now jointly managed by FAO and WHO, with the Secretariat in WHO.

With the goal of preventing the international spread of contaminated food and foodborne disease and strengthening food safety systems globally, INFOSAN seeks to:

- I. promote the rapid exchange of information during food safety related events;
- II. share information on important food safety related issues of global interest;
- III. promote partnership and collaboration between countries; and
- IV. help countries strengthen their capacity to manage food safety risks.

Activities

The work of INFOSAN has two distinct components:

1) Routine INFOSAN activities:

- a. INFOSAN Information Notes are developed by the INFOSAN Secretariat on a regular basis to provide key information about emergent or topical food safety issues.
- b. Food safety guidelines, questionnaires, newsletters and factsheets are shared with INFOSAN members for further dissemination within their organizations.
- c. INFOSAN members aid routine in-country sharing of information to strengthen the national food control system.

2) Emergency INFOSAN activities:

- a. INFOSAN identifies, verifies and shares information on food safety-related events which involve contaminated foods in international commerce, and foodborne illness outbreaks, not limited to one country.
- b. INFOSAN Secretariat provides technical assistance to national governments in managing food safety and food production-related events or emergencies.
- c. Emergency Contact Points are actively engaged to provide updated information on food safety events and to ensure timely information exchange with countries potentially importing or exporting the implicated product.

○ Achievements to date

- The First Global Meeting of INFOSAN members was held in Abu Dhabi, UAE in December 2010 with more than 150 participants from 65 countries.
- Published report on INFOSAN's progress from 2004-2010:
http://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/fs_management/infosan_progress_report/en/index.html
- INFOSAN provides rapid access to food safety contact points in 177 member countries
- INFOSAN has been active in hundreds of food safety events since its inception in 2004.
- INFOSAN provides a confidential mechanism for information sharing through the use of a secure website.
- INFOSAN facilitates the sharing of lessons learnt and the exchange of new knowledge related to food safety and foodborne illness.
- INFOSAN has published 35 Information Notes on a broad range of food safety topics, made publicly available on the WHO website.



This Initiative responds to World Health Assembly (WHA) resolution *WHA53.15, 2000*: " ... to put in place a global strategy for the surveillance of foodborne diseases and for the efficient gathering and exchange of information in and between countries and regions" and a request from Codex Alimentarius to establish a mechanism for the exchange of information on food safety emergencies between official contact points designated by the competent authorities.

The need to develop INFOSAN was further underscored in *WHA 63.3, 2010*: "...to strengthen the emergency function of the International Food Safety Authorities Network as a critical component of WHO's preventive and emergency operations relative to food safety"

○ Planned activities

- Launch the new and improved INFOSAN Community Website to share alerts and other information and to enhance interaction among members
- Work with partners to improve member's capacity in national food safety emergency response planning and risk assessment during food safety emergencies through national/regional training workshops
- Revise the INFOSAN member's guide to establish clear processes for sharing information within the network
- Work with regional partners to improve and promote strategic partnerships among INFOSAN members with other networks and initiatives in the regions

WHO contacts

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