

The Initiative:

- Combines **independent expert advice** with **WHO's public health leadership capacity** to assemble globally accepted health information.
- Benefits from **existing WHO experience in Burden of Disease** methodologies.
- Unites **previously dissociated disciplines** - such as risk assessment and epidemiology - to arrive at results that are meaningful to all scientific constituencies.
- Uses a thorough **peer-review process** to ensure scientific rigour, objectivity and credibility of the results.
- Works in **synergy and close partnership** with Member States, technical institutions, non-governmental organizations, industry, donors and other key stakeholders to increase efficiency and avoid duplication.
- Follows a comprehensive **communication strategy** to ensure regular dialogue among stakeholders and the effective distribution and use of results.
- Informs and shapes important **global public health priorities and strategies** that foster health security, economic growth and international development.



© Barbara Schmeiser

Foodborne Diseases (FBD) are a growing public health problem worldwide. Their impact is amplified through increasing international travel, population mobility and the globalization of our food supply.

In recognition of this, more than 50 developed and developing countries recently adopted the Beijing Declaration on Food Safety, urging all countries to base their food safety measures on sound scientific evidence and risk analysis.

The WHO Initiative to Estimate the Global Burden of FBD is a critical element in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration. It will provide stakeholders with the scientific evidence to prioritize preventive action, assess the impact of food safety measures and advise on the cost-effective use of resources. It is an integral part of WHO's global efforts to foster public health security and international development.

“ *Governments need to give food safety just as much attention as they devote to the quality and safety of pharmaceutical products. Not everyone needs to take medicine every day, but all people need food, each and every day.* ”

Dr Margaret Chan
Director-General

For more information

http://www.who.int/foodsafety/foodborne_disease/ferg/
e-mail: foodsafety@who.int

Department of Food Safety, Zoonoses
and Foodborne Diseases (FOS)
Health Security and Environment (HSE)
World Health Organization (WHO)
20 Avenue Appia
1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland



Estimating the Global Burden of Foodborne Diseases



**World Health
Organization**

Foodborne Diseases (FBD) - a major public health problem

With every bite we eat, we put our health at risk. Although most commonly associated with self-limiting diarrhoea or vomiting, millions of people fall ill every year and many die as a result of eating unsafe food. Hundreds of different FBD exist - some have been known for centuries while others have only recently emerged.

WELL-KNOWN

Salmonella – a high risk pathogen: Illness caused by salmonella species is linked to a variety of foods, especially poultry, eggs and dairy products. Recent outbreaks, however, have increasingly been tied to fresh produce, including lettuce, sprouts, tomatoes, and other fruit- and vegetable-containing dishes. This potentially deadly type of food poisoning is widespread but can be prevented through simple, routine food safety practices such as thorough cooking.

RECENTLY DISCOVERED

Acrylamide - a toxic chemical in starchy food: Heavily fried and baked foods, such as potato chips, bread and coffee - goods widely consumed - contain acrylamide, a substance which may cause cancer in humans. Many different constituencies, including the food industry, are working on developing new technologies to minimize acrylamide levels in food.

Although much is known, the full extent and cost of unsafe food has never been reliably described

Why should we estimate the Global Burden of FBD?

1. To foster health security

Foodborne diseases threaten international public health security. As trade, travel and migration increase, so does the spread of dangerous pathogens and contaminants in food across national borders.

BENEFITS Rapid detection and detailed knowledge of foodborne disease burden will **reduce the risk** of the spread of disease and catalyze international action where needed.

2. To promote economic growth and development

FBD outbreaks can have devastating economic consequences, even in rich countries. The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) outbreak in the UK has led to financial losses totalling US\$ 5 billion. Developing countries with agrarian societies are particularly vulnerable to FBD outbreaks, which jeopardize their economic stability and development efforts, including the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 1 (reduction of poverty) and Goal 4 (reduction of child mortality).

BENEFITS FBD burden estimates will **demonstrate the real impact** of unsafe food on economic growth and development, thus emphasizing the need for accelerated interventions.

3. To strengthen evidence-based policy-making

Data from surveillance systems are insufficient to describe the true magnitude of FBD burden. Too often FBD go unrecognized, unreported or uninvestigated. Reliable epidemiological estimates which draw on all available data sources should underpin evidence-based policy-making.

BENEFITS Comprehensive burden of FBD estimates **provide the scientific basis for** food safety **policies**, including the standard setting and evaluation activities of the Codex Alimentarius.

WHO's response

WHO Initiative to Estimate the Global Burden of FBD

In order to bridge the current data gap, WHO launched this new Initiative which will:

- 1) provide global and regional estimates on the burden of FBD of microbial, parasitic, and chemical origin.
- 2) train and strengthen the capacity of countries to conduct burden of FBD studies, and document and map their results.
- 3) assist countries in the use of burden of FBD estimates for the cost-effectiveness analyses of prevention, intervention and control measures.
- 4) increase countries' awareness of, and commitment to, the implementation of food safety standards.

A multi-disciplinary group of external internationally renowned scientists has been established to implement the activities and goals of the Initiative.

The Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group (FERG)



FERG and members of the Secretariat, November 2007

The Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group (FERG)

- consists of: **A Steering Group and Thematic Task Forces** advancing the work in the areas of enteric, parasitic and chemical FBD, and
- is coordinated by the **WHO Secretariat** in the WHO Department of Food Safety, Zoonoses and Foodborne Disease (FOS).

FERG and the WHO Secretariat are in permanent exchange and interaction with the stakeholder community.

