Complex Food Chain Increases Food Safety Risks

Tuesday 31 March, 2015

Related Sectors:

Health ::

Scan Me:

On World Health Day 2015, WHO/Europe estimates that levels of foodborne disease are much higher than currently reported and underlines the need for improved collaboration among sectors to lower the health risks associated with unsafe food.

Our food chain is longer and more complex than ever before, and demographic, cultural, economic and environmental developments – globalized trade, travel and migration, an ageing population, changing consumer trends and habits, new technologies, emergencies, climate change and extreme weather events – are increasing foodborne health risks.

"The fact that we significantly underestimate how many people become ill from chemicals in the food chain and from common microorganisms such as *Salmonella*and *Campylobacter* should start alarm bells ringing across the many areas with a stake in our food chain. A failure in food safety at any link in this chain, from the environment, through primary production, processing, transport, trade, catering or in the home, can have significant health and economic consequences," says Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe.

Current surveillance and reporting systems across the WHO European Region are limited and detect only a small fraction of cases. This underreporting is greater in countries with less advanced laboratory capacities and less developed surveillance systems. Better data are needed to respond effectively to risks.

"Health 2020, the European policy for health and well-being, calls for effective communication, information sharing and joint action domestically and internationally between the public health, animal health and agricultural sectors. This will go a long way towards ensuring safer food on our plates," adds Dr Jakab.

Challenges to food safety

- Driven by consumer demand, we now have greater access to a wider variety of foods, produced out of season, transported across continents, processed for our convenience and increasingly eaten outside the home. The average annual volume growth in agricultural trade between 1950 and 2010 was about 4% and therefore higher than an annual growth in global agricultural production of 2%, according to the World Trade Report 2014.
- Contamination from a single source may become widespread and have enormous health and economic consequences. In 2011, for example, an*enterohaemorrhagic Escherichia coli* (EHEC) outbreak in Germany and France, linked to imported contaminated fenugreek seeds, led to almost 4000 cases of EHEC infection in 16 countries, including more than 900 haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS) cases and 55 deaths. The estimated loss for farmers and industries was US$ 1.3 billion.
- Changes in animal food production are leading to an increase in the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases. Of 335 emerging infectious disease events in humans between 1940 and 2004, it is estimated that 60% were transmitted from animals and many of these were foodborne.

WHO calls on policy-makers

- To build and maintain adequate food safety systems and infrastructures, including laboratory capacities and surveillance and reporting systems;
- To respond to and manage food safety risks along the entire food chain, including during emergencies;
- To foster multisectoral collaboration among public health, animal health, agriculture and other sectors for better communication, information sharing and joint action;
- To integrate food safety into broader food policies and programmes (e.g. nutrition and food security);
- To think globally and act locally to ensure that food produced domestically is as safe as possible internationally.

World Health Day 2015: food safety

World Health Day 2015, celebrated on 7 April, is an opportunity to recognize the important food safety role of all those involved in food production, and to strengthen collaboration and coordination among

these various areas, in order to prevent, detect and respond to foodborne diseases efficiently and cost-effectively. A kaleidoscope of events is planned across the globe.

People are also invited to engage through social media and to promote "From farm to plate: make food safe" using the hashtag #safefood. Experts from European organizations will be online during a Twitter chat on 7 April 2015, #safefoodchat, from 14:00–15:00 CEST to answer questions and to provide food safety advice.

Global burden of foodborne diseases

In 2006, WHO established the Foodborne Diseases Burden Epidemiology Reference Group to estimate the global burden and to provide Member States with data and tools to support policy-makers and other stakeholders in setting appropriate and evidence-informed priorities of food safety at the country level. The final report of the Group, composed of internationally renowned experts in a broad range of disciplines relevant to global foodborne disease epidemiology, will be published in October 2015.

-Ends-

Links

World Health Day 2015: Food safety
www.euro.who.int/whd2015

Factsheet: Food safety

Infographic: Salmonella in Europe

Estimation of the global burden of foodborne diseaseshttp://www.who.int/foodsafety/areas_work/foodborne-diseases/ferg/en/

For further information, contact:

Stephanie Brickman
Communications Consultant
WHO Regional Office for Europe
United Nations City, Marmorvej 51
2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark
Tel.: +45 45336844,
+45 40 87 48 76 (mobile)
E-mail: sbr@euro.who.int

Hilde Kruse
Programme Manager, Food Safety
Division of Communicable Diseases, Health Security and Environment
WHO Regional Office for Europe
United Nations City, Marmorvej 51
2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark
Tel.: +45 45336754,
+45 29 44 05 06 (mobile)
E-mail: hik@euro.who.int

Company Contact:

_

Pressat Wire

E. support[@]pressat.co.uk

View Online

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.wire.pressat.co.uk