

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
**Update for Conference for Food Protection Executive Board**  
**August 29, 2007**

**General**

CAPT Art Liang, MD, USPHS, will be replaced as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention representative to the Conference Executive Board by CAPT Charles S. Otto, III, RS, USPHS, effective at the August 28-29, 2007 board meeting. A CDC 2 year rotation has been established between the Office of Food Safety and the Environmental Health Services Branch. Each office will continue to fully support this representation with Conference reports and participation.

2008 CDC Council Consultants have been designated as follows:

- I. Charles Otto / Alternate Vince Radke
- II. Carol Selman / Alternate Laura Green
- III. Don Sharp / Alternate Art Liang

Contact information for each will be provided directly to Conference Executive Director. All have attended previous conferences and are current members.

The CDC MOU with the Conference has been drafted, reviewed by the Environmental Health Services Branch and the Office of Food Safety and has been submitted to the CDC Director for approval. It is currently in the Office of General Counsel for review and final editing. It was modeled after current FDA and USDA MOU's.

***Foodborne Outbreak Investigation And Response***

Improving foodborne outbreak detection, investigation and response continues to be a high priority for CDC. Significant collaborative efforts currently include:

**Recent Outbreak Investigations:** CDC has been active in coordinating investigations of several widely-publicized multistate outbreaks of foodborne illness. The first was an outbreak caused by *Salmonella* Wandsworth (a very rare *Salmonella* serotype) associated with a puffed rice and corn snack that was coated with a vegetable spice mix. The involved company voluntarily recalled all related products. A recent multistate outbreak of botulism was also investigated by CDC, FDA, USDA and many states. This outbreak was found to be associated with commercially produced chili sauce for hot dogs and resulted in a large national recall of more than 90 product lines, including several lines of pet foods. Further information about this outbreak is available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/botulism/botulism.htm> .

**CDC-FDA Collaboration Forum:** The CDC Director and FDA Commissioner have begun regular meetings to further improve collaboration and coordination between the agencies. Food safety is one of several topics on their initial agenda. As a reflection of this higher profile, NCZVED and relevant FDA centers involved in food are meeting 1-2 times per month. Initial topics of discussion include outbreak coordination, more timely sharing food attribution analyses, and general exchange of data between FDA and CDC.

**OutbreakNet Meeting:** The 3rd Annual OutbreakNet Meeting, formerly known as the Foodborne Epidemiologists Meeting, was held in Atlantic City, NJ in conjunction with Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) Meeting on June 24-25th, 2007. One-hundred fifty seven

individuals attended the Meeting. Participants included members of the OutbreakNet group from 45 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and representatives from the CDC. Topics included multi-jurisdictional outbreak procedures, management of clusters, a review of national foodborne outbreak surveillance data, needs assessment of state epidemiologists from throughout the nation, and a review of an ongoing outbreak investigation.

**Council to Improve Foodborne Outbreak Response (CIFOR):** CIFOR is a collaborative effort of nine associations and federal agencies to develop model programs and processes to facilitate outbreak investigation and response. CIFOR's agenda includes improving performance and coordination of relevant local, state and federal public health agencies involved in epidemiology, environmental health, laboratory science, and regulatory affairs. CIFOR is co-chaired by the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) and the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and includes representatives from CSTE, NACCHO, the Association of Public Health Laboratories, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, the Association of Food and Drug Officials, the National Environmental Health Association, the Food and Drug Administration, the Food Safety and Inspection Service, and CDC. The next meeting takes place in September and will focus on identification of new projects.

**Multi-disciplinary Team Training:** This initiative provides up-to-date foodborne disease outbreak investigation and surveillance training. A primary objective is to increase the competency of epidemiologists, laboratorians, environmental health and other public health professionals through multidisciplinary team training. The training includes interactive group exercises, Q&A sessions, and didactic lectures on passive surveillance, outbreak determination, environmental assessment, epidemiological investigation, laboratory guidance, and report writing. Training workshops amalgamate the many health disciplines (e.g., environmental health, epidemiology, public health nursing, etc.) involved in conducting a successful outbreak investigation in order to emphasize the importance of teamwork. CDC presently is collaborating with the National Association of Environmental Health to provide such training through NEHA's Epi-Ready Team Training Course. To date, more than 1,100 public health professionals have been trained through this mechanism, including 98 who participated in train-the-trainer courses. Participants in the Epi-Ready train-the-trainer course receive a generic slide set that can be modified with their agency logos and used in additional trainings.

**Norovirus Activity - United States, 2006-2007:** Last week's, [\*Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report\*](#), August 24, 2007, featured a report which outlined the increase of norovirus last year. In the study of the responses from 40 state epidemiologists, 24 had 5 or more outbreaks. Ninety-two percent (92%) of these 24 had increases ranging from 18 – 800% compared to 2005. Fifty percent (50%) of these outbreaks were associated with long-term care facilities and many were identified as associated with two new norovirus strains. Norovirus was listed as cause of death in two cases of infection in this study. CDC personnel presented at the historic National Restaurant Association – *Virus Conference* held in Atlanta this month that highlighted the problem with ill food workers, the importance of no-bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, and effectively dealing with clean-up issues surrounding sick workers and patrons.

## **Environmental Health Services**

### **General**

Recent personnel changes have included a new Environmental Health Services Branch Chief, Rob Blake, former GA Division of Public Health, Environmental Health Director, and previously, DeKalb County (GA) Environmental Health Director. Rob, who is currently the President of the National Environmental Health Association, is credited by the National Restaurant Association for creating a model Food Code implementation with the states' recent adoption of the 2005 FDA model code.

CAPT Jaret Ames, USPHS, has also recently become Branch Chief in the Vessel Sanitation Program, CDC's comprehensive environmental health program for all cruise ships that call on U.S. ports. That program also uses the latest edition of Food Code as its food protection program standard. Jaret has been instrumental in the upgrade of the World Health Organization's *Guide to Shipboard Sanitation*, which includes food, water, and other environmental health areas and infection control, and will relate to both passenger and cargo vessels.

EHSB has been integrally involved in developing a new model Aquatic Health Code through a Conference for Food Protection-like process that involves all stakeholders. Members of the steering committee, Steven Goode and David Ludwig with the food conference, have been valuable references for how the process should be working in developing the aquatic code. On a related issue, the number of waterborne disease outbreak reports is higher in 2007 than previous years. There have been 29 total to date with 17 of those related to *Cryptosporidium* in aquatic venues. Vigilance against secondary infections is important in communities, including working with infected food workers who have infected through aquatic activities. See [www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming) for additional information on the Model Aquatic Health Code and waterborne disease prevention.

The EHSB staff has also been active in other water initiatives including taking over the environmental health aspects of CDC Global Water Health activities. The EHS-Net project discussed below, has also been expanded to small non-regulated water systems in collaboration with EPA support. Our emergency response team is working with the CDC Division of Parasitic Diseases, EPA, and AWWA on assessing and improving community response, including food establishments, to the frequent Boil Water Advisories issued across the nation.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES NETWORK (EHS-NET)**

The Environmental Health Specialist Network (EHS-Net) annual meeting took place in January. This meeting marked the first EHS-Net annual meeting to include industry representatives as stakeholders. Industry participation in this meeting and EHS-Net is an important way to enhance industry awareness of this program and to promote collaboration on projects of mutual interest.

EHS-Net, a program coordinated by CDC's National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH), focuses on environmental factors contributing to food and water borne disease. Currently, EHS-Net is the only federal-state program effort with this specific focus. It represents a collaborative effort among epidemiologists, environmental health specialists, and laboratorians within nine states (CA, CT, GA, IA, MN, NY, OR, RI, TN) and three federal agencies (FDA, USDA, and EPA). In the food arena, EHS-Net has been and is instrumental in characterizing policies and practices of retail foodservice establishments associated with foodborne outbreaks (e.g., the importance of food safety certification of kitchen managers, the importance of food-handling policies and practices in foodservice establishments, etc.). The EHS-Net program provides industry and regulators with science-based, practical research necessary to adopt recommended practices and for developing new or evaluating existing foodborne disease prevention programs.

**Restaurant-associated Outbreak Investigation Practices Survey:** This initiative recognizes the importance of environmental health specialists' investigations of restaurant-associated foodborne outbreaks. These investigations can identify and correct unsafe food handling practices that contribute to these outbreaks and also improve understanding of the etiology of foodborne illness through the identification of pathogens associated with foodborne outbreaks. In partnership with CDC's National Center for Environmental Health, Georgia (GA) State University will be conducting a national survey of environmental public health practitioners from retail foodservice programs to identify and assess current restaurant foodborne illness outbreak

investigation practices, and barriers to effectively conducting investigations in order to determine how they could be improved. GA State University professors Dr. Mildred Cody and Dr. Virginia O'Leary, the lead investigators, will be primarily responsible for data collection and analysis, with CDC providing technical assistance. GA State University graduate students will be contacting food safety programs to obtain contact information for potential participants.

### **EHS-Net Project Summary:**

#### **Completed Projects\***

- Beef Study
- Beliefs About Sources of Gastrointestinal Illness (Population Study)
- Egg-Handling Study
- EHS-Net Information System
- Environmental Health Specialists Focus Group Study
- Food-Worker Focus Group Study
- Food Workers and Their Food-Preparation Practices Population Study
- Hand-Hygiene Study

\* - See <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EHSNet/highlights.htm> for publications and abstracts

#### **Projects in Progress: Food**

- Chicken-Handling Study – Piloted / Waiting for Admin. Approval
- Complaint System – Completed – Manuscript Development
- Environmental Surface Sampling – 2 studies / Completed – Data Analysis
- Ground Beef-Handling Study – Completed / Manuscript Development
- Ill Food-Handler Study – Data Collection
- Outbreak Study – Data Collection
- Refuser Study – Data Collection
- Tomato-Handling Study – Completed – Data Analysis
- Value of Inspections – Completed / Manuscript Development
- Leafy Greens Study - Design
- Cooling Practices Study - Design

### **Other EHS-Net Activities:**

**EHS-Net Information System (EHSNIS)** - The Environmental Health Specialists Network Information System (EHSNIS) is an internet application developed at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). EHSNIS currently supports the data collection activities of the Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net) in the area of food-borne illness outbreak prevention.

EHSNIS is also available for use by government agencies and nonprofit organizations to support their data collection needs relating to environmental health. The Conference for Food Protection Electronic Inspection Data Capture Committee just recently used the EHSNIS for a national survey of food inspection data collection practices in state, local, tribal and territorial food protection programs.

**EHS-Net / Industry Partners** – Nine food service and retail food store partner organizations have been involved in discussions with the EHS-Net project team and stakeholders during 2007. Industry input has been sought and is still in the early stages of formulating directions and possible projects.

**EHS-Net Training** – A training course is being developed on how to conduct an environmental assessment during a foodborne outbreak. A second program is being developed to train more Environmental Health Specialists in the research methodology needed to participate in the Foodborne Outbreak Study.

**EHS-Net Water** – The EHS-Net research project has expanded to include drinking water, with a specific focus on small systems. Partners in this initiative are NY, CA, MN, TN, and GA. Initial activities have included enhanced surveillance for waterborne outbreaks related to small drinking water systems which has resulted in a number of previously unreported outbreaks to be added to the national totals. Improved waterborne outbreak investigations that include an in-depth environmental health assessment to determine environmental antecedents and highlight prevention strategies is another goal of the project. By building on the successful networking principles already established to understand the environmental causes of foodborne disease, EHS-Net can also provide a forum to focus on current environmental public health issues related to small drinking water systems. It would also serve as a platform for initiating projects to investigate health effects, pilot monitoring programs, test public education programs, and investigate new mitigation methods for private wells and small systems.