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# **Better Communications, Better Public Health Outcomes**

## **Experiences and Challenges with Outbreak Response and Investigation: A State Health Agency Perspective**

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**Representing: Association of State and Territorial Health Officials**

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# About the Association of State & Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)

*Formulate and influence sound national public health policy and to assist state health agencies in the development and implementation of programs and policies to promote health and prevent disease.*

## Vision

- Healthy people thriving in a nation free of preventable illness and injury

## Mission

- Transforming public health within states and territories to help members dramatically improve health and wellness

# About State Public Health

57 State and Territorial Health Agencies vary in:  
Structure

- Freestanding or Part of umbrella agency
- Authority over local public health
  - Centralized
  - Decentralized
  - Mixed authority
- Size:

Number of Employees	Number of Agencies	Average Budget
1500 employees or less	27	\$ 345,721,460
1501 to 3000 employees	12	\$ 1,151,535,472
3001 to 4500 employees	6	\$ 1,184,831,004
4501 employees or more	4	\$ 2,219,025,041

- Program & Functional Responsibilities

# SHA Programs & Functions

Public Health Function or Program	Agencies Reporting Full Authority	Agencies Reporting Partial Authority	Percentage of Respondents
Drinking Water Regulation	21	21	81%
Environmental Health	25	23	92%
Environmental Regulation and Management	11	28	75%
Food Safety	31	17	92%
Health Facility Regulation and Inspection	40	7	90%
Health Professional Licensing	18	19	71%
Medicaid	10	9	37%
Medical Errors Reporting	17	11	54%
Medical Examiner	12	4	31%
Mental Health	9	10	37%
Public Health Laboratories	47	3	96%
Tobacco Prevention and Control	42	9	98%
Substance Abuse Prevention	16	12	54%
Vital Statistics Administration	49	2	98%
WIC	47	3	96%

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# Role of State Health Agencies in Food Safety and Health Protection

- Prevention
- Detection / Surveillance
- Outbreak Response
- Policy Development
  - Statewide
  - Nationally (through national organizations)

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# Role of State Health Agencies in Food Safety and Health Protection

- Key SHA Offices involved in food safety and food protection activities:
  - Executive Leadership
  - Environmental Health
  - Epidemiology
  - State Public Health Laboratory

# State Public Health Offices Responsible for Food Safety and Health Protection

- Executive Leadership (SHOs)
  - SHOs are intimately involved in foodborne illness outbreaks, especially ones that are not limited to a distinct locality and that continually grow. While the specific roles of SHOs during outbreaks may vary from state to state, there are common roles and responsibilities shared by SHOs during a foodborne illness outbreak
    - Decision-maker
    - Governor Advisor
    - State spokesperson
    - Liaison with federal agencies and states

# State Public Health Offices Responsible for Food Safety and Health Protection

- Environmental Health
  - State Environmental Health Programs prevent foodborne illness by ensuring that foods prepared and served by food establishments are safe, unadulterated, and prepared under sanitary conditions.
  - Regulation, Inspection, and/or Licensing
    - Food service establishments
    - Food processors
  - Food Safety Education



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# State Public Health Offices Responsible for Food Safety and Health Protection

- Epidemiology
  - Surveillance
  - Investigation
  - Interpretation
  - Coordinate intervention necessary to prevent further spread of illness
  - Dissemination of Information

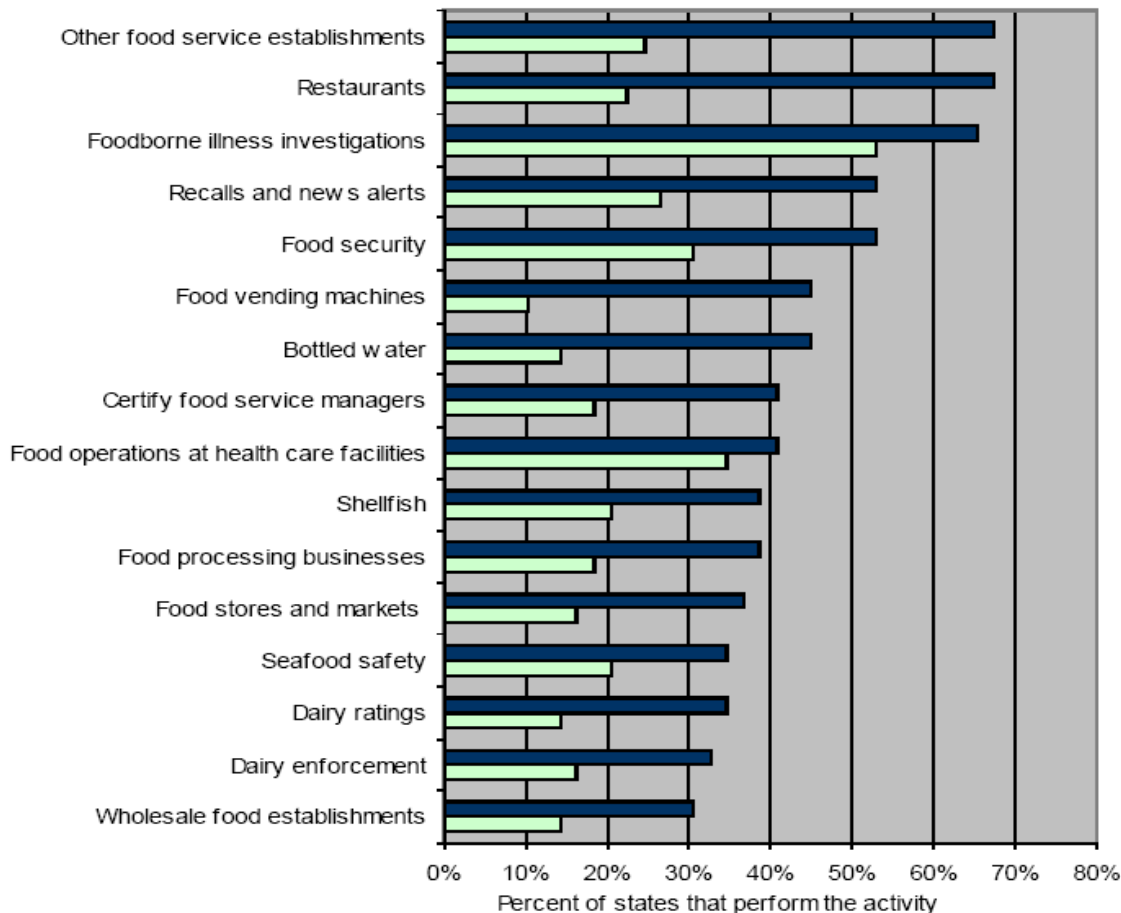
# State Public Health Offices Responsible for Food Safety and Health Protection

- Laboratory
  - Public health laboratories screen specimens from patients being treated for suspected foodborne illness. With few exceptions, state and local public health laboratories are the primary facilities responsible for confirming the presence of foodborne microbes and toxins in clinical specimens, and for characterizing these agents in support of epidemiologic investigations.

*Association of Public Health Laboratories: "A Recipe For Stronger Food Safety Testing Programs: Findings & Recommendations from the APHL Food Safety Laboratory Capacity Assessment Project"*

# Responsibilities are often shared across agencies...

- In Env Health Unit in 82% of states
- In another SHA unit in 78% of states



## Food Protection Activities Shared with other units in SHAs

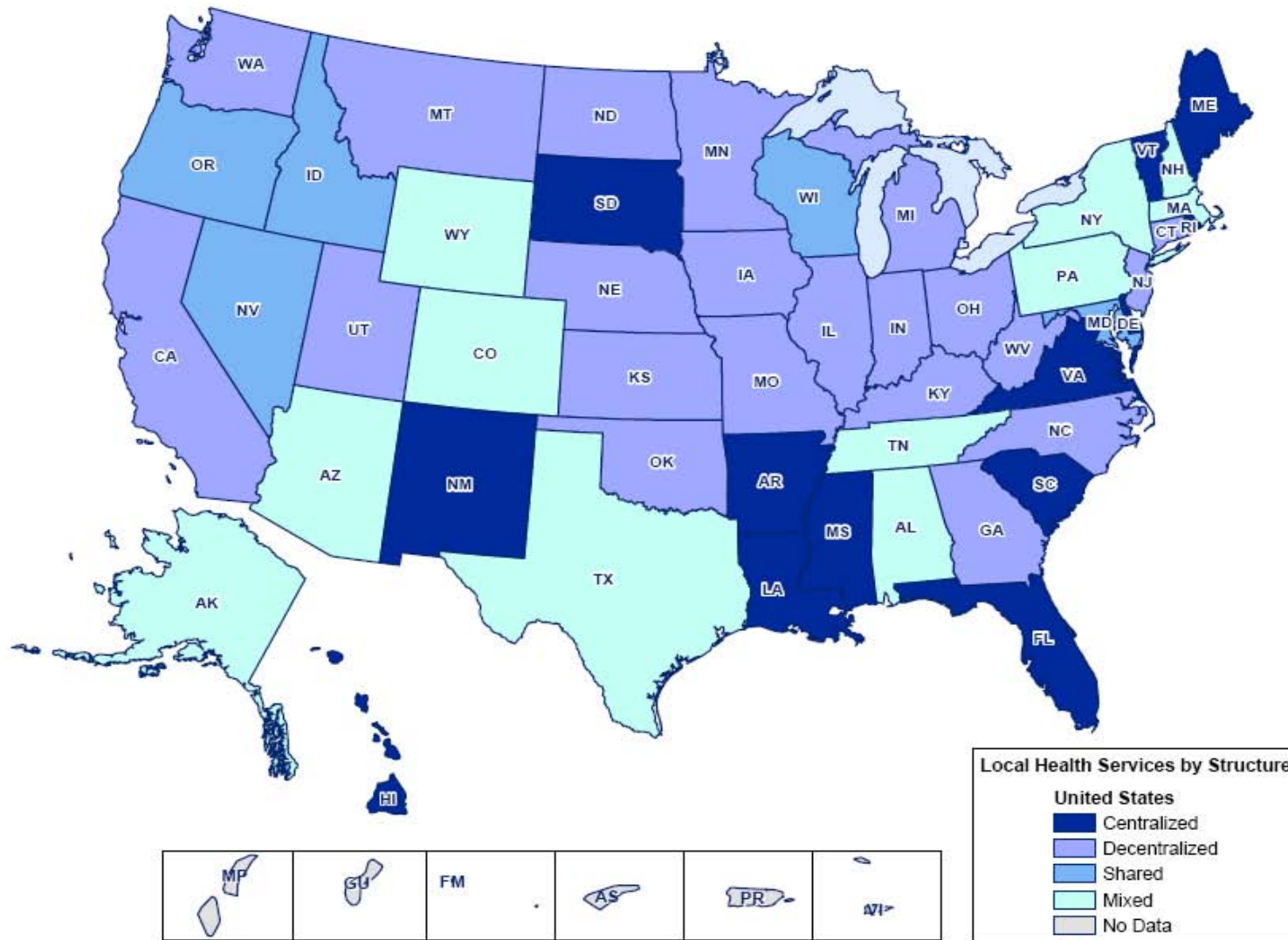
- Foodborne illness response – 22% of states reported responsibility shared (not in a single unit).

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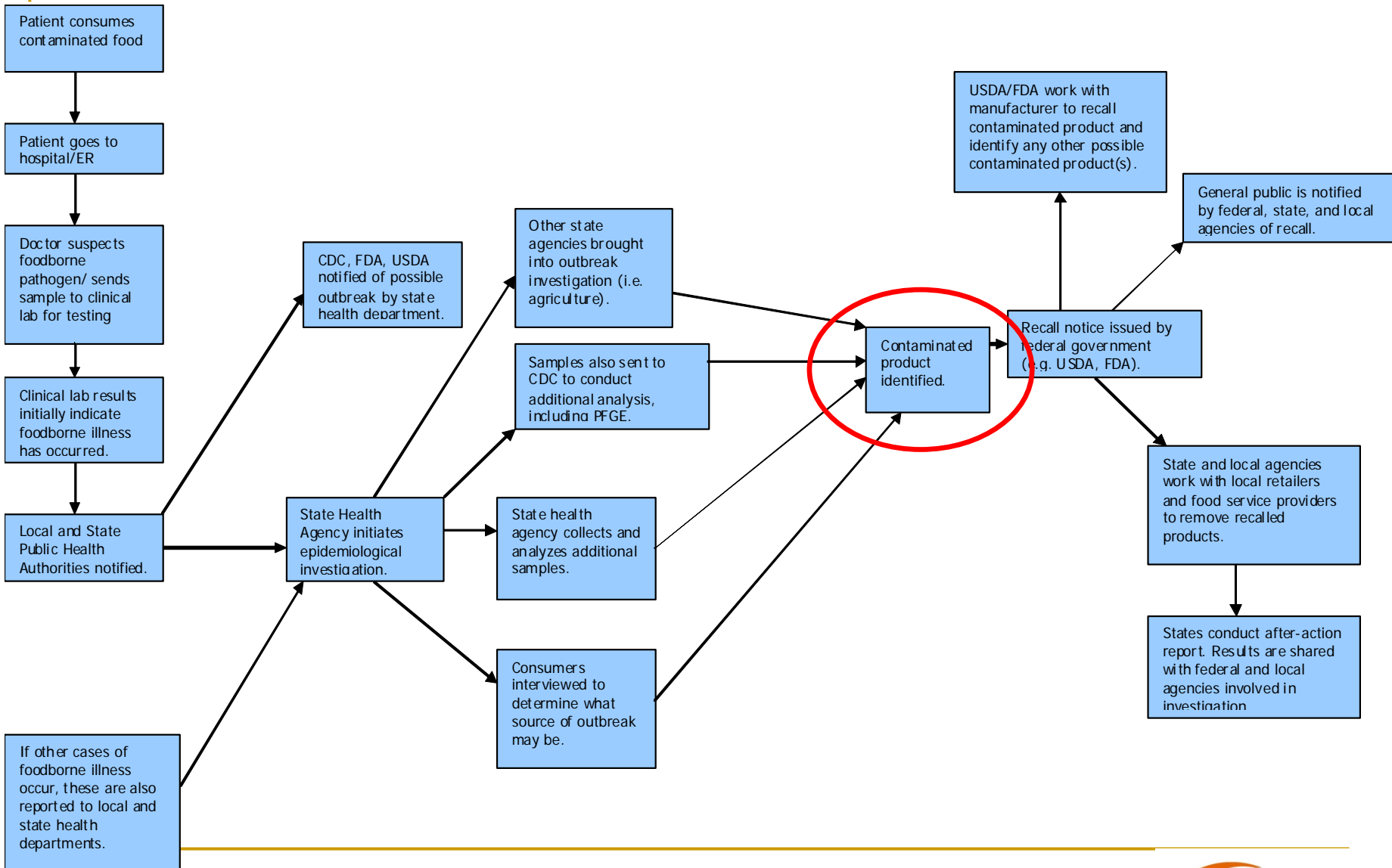
# **Beyond State Public Health: Other State Agencies Responsible for Food Safety and Health Protection**

- State Departments of Agriculture
  - State inspectors
  - Agriculture Laboratories
- State Departments of Environmental Quality or Natural Resources

# Local Public Health Departments



# The Challenge!



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# Barriers from recent experiences:

- Communication
  - Who knows what, when, and who can do something with it?
- Information flow
  - In all directions, on all levels—who has it? Who needs it?
- Need to strengthen understanding of roles and responsibilities of all actors, public and private.

# Enhanced Communications and Collaborations Activities...

- CIFOR
- ASTHO Environmental Health Policy Committee
- ASTHO Food Safety Taskforce
- ASTHO – NACCHO Joint Workshop on improving state-local coordination in foodborne illness outbreak
- USDA Collaboration
- FDA 50 State Meeting / Food Protection Plan



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# Where do we go from here?

- New, innovative ways to address barriers in foodborne illness prevention and response.
- Continue to increase communication and coordination between and among all federal, state, and local agencies responsible for keeping food safe and protecting against outbreaks.

# We still have much work to do...

## USDA orders largest beef recall: 143.4 million pounds

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By James R. Healey and Julie Schmit, USA TODAY



The U.S. government on Sunday ordered the largest beef recall in U.S. history — 143.4 million pounds — and said the meat has been used in school lunches and food assistance programs.

The government portrayed the action as precautionary and classified it as a Class II recall, meaning there is little likelihood of illness.

The beef dates to cattle slaughtered two years ago, starting Feb. 1, 2006, at HallmarkWestland Meat Packing, based in Chino, Calif. The USDA said it believes most already has been eaten. It will remove the rest from inventories.

**LATEST:** [USDA will step up inspections at slaughterhouses](#)  
**COMPANY REACTION:** [HallmarkWestland Meat Packing website](#)

"We don't know exactly where all the product went" but will "cast a wide net to make sure that we can find all the product that we can find," Ken Petersen at the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service said in a conference call with reporters Sunday.

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Enlarge By Damian Dovarganes, AP

A worker throws a piece of meat among the cattle carcasses in a truck at the HallmarkWestland Meat Packing slaughterhouse in Chino, Calif., on Jan. 30.

### MORE DEVELOPMENTS

- Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer said his department has evidence that Westland did not routinely contact its veterinarian when cattle became non-ambulatory after passing inspection, violating health regulations.
- Officials estimate that about 37 million pounds of the recalled beef went to school programs, but they believe most of the meat probably has already been eaten.
- Two former employees were charged Friday. Five felony counts of animal cruelty and three misdemeanors were filed against a pen manager. Three misdemeanor counts illegal movement of a non-ambulatory animal were

## Listeria Risk Spurs Meat, Poultry Recall Gourmet Boutique Recalls More Than 286,000 Pounds of Meat and Poultry; No Illnesses Reported

By Miranda Hitti  
WebMD Medical News

Reviewed by Louise

May 5, 2008 -- Gourmet Boutique, a company based in Jamaica, N.Y., is about 286,320 pounds of fresh and frozen meat and poultry products that contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes* bacteria.

No illnesses linked to the recalled foods have been reported, according to Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Listeria can cause [listeriosis](#), an uncommon but potentially fatal disease people rarely contract listeriosis. But listeriosis can cause [high fever](#), [severe headache](#), neck stiffness, and [nausea](#). It can also cause [miscarriage](#) and as well as serious and sometimes fatal infections in infants, elders, and weakened immune systems.

The recall includes 21 products -- including chicken salads, sandwiches, burritos -- that were distributed nationwide. A full list of the recalled products posted on the USDA web site.

For more information on the recall, contact Gourmet Boutique's recall info hotline at 347-887-0083.

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**ASTHO-NACCHO  
JOINT CONFERENCE**  
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# Questions?

Contact:  
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