



## Fighting Foodborne Illness: How FDA Helps Keep the Food Supply Safe

The Food and Drug Administration ensures the safety and wholesomeness of almost 80 percent of the United States food supply—all foods except meat, poultry and some egg products, which are regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The FDA does the job so well that American food is as safe as any in the world, but changing tastes and other developments keep presenting the agency with new challenges.

For example, Americans today eat a greater variety of imported foods than ever, and they are relying more and more on commercially prepared food products. The growing numbers of senior Americans have increased the proportion of the U.S. population considered at risk for developing foodborne illness to 25 percent. Scientists have identified more than five times as many foodborne pathogens than were known 50 years ago; in addition, the FDA has recently confronted such potentially serious food safety hazards as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs), chemical contaminants, pesticides, and food allergens.

Thanks to increased funding in recent years, the FDA and other federal, state and local authorities have greatly strengthened the safety of the U.S. food supply. With this

food safety initiative, the FDA has:

- launched new programs to improve the safety of seafood, fresh fruits and vegetables, sprouts, juice and eggs;
- focused its field inspection program on products at “high risk” for microbiological contamination;
- developed new methods of monitoring the mushrooming food imports; and
- made its research, risk assessment and education activities responsive to today’s food safety needs.

### Protecting Food Against Terrorism

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 made the protection of the national food supply against willful contamination a top priority for the FDA. To fulfill this vital task, the agency has carried out or initiated the following actions:

- It has cooperated with the industry to publish guidance for food processors and importers on how to minimize the risk of food tampering and terrorism.
- It is hiring 600 additional import investigators, laboratory analysts and other personnel, who will use the latest technology and scientific equipment to help ensure the safety of imported and domestic foods.
- It is seeking new legislative authority that will provide new tools to prevent the distribution of food that may be hazardous.

For example, the FDA recently developed an educational campaign, “To Your Health! Food Safety for Seniors,” which is tailored to the unique information needs of the growing U.S. elderly population. Responding to the increased American consumption of imported food, the agency has conducted training seminars to familiarize regulatory officials abroad with FDA’s “good agricultural practices,” identification of food contaminants, and other food safety topics they need to know to make sure that foods exported from their countries to the United States meet the U.S. safety standards.

Since prevention is the cornerstone of the agency’s strategy for the reduction of foodborne illness, the FDA’s scientists are involved in cutting-edge research projects focused on the development of a sound scientific basis for the agency’s public health decisions. All these activities have made the FDA’s program for pathogen reduction substantially stronger than it was as recently as three or four years ago.

**For more information,** call the FDA’s Food Information line, 1-888-SAFEFOOD (1-888-723-3366) or visit the FDA’s Web site at [www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fs-toc.html](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fs-toc.html).