

**Study:** A population-based estimate of the substantial burden of diarrhoeal disease in the United States; FoodNet, 1996-2003

**Lead Author:** T.F. Jones

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**Correspondence:** Dr. Timothy Jones, Tennessee Department of Health, Communicable and Environmental Disease Services, 425 5th Avenue North, 1st Floor, Cordell Hull Building Nashville, Tennessee 37243. (E-mail: [tim.f.jones@state.tn.us](mailto:tim.f.jones@state.tn.us))

How much diarrheal disease is there in the United States? The answer to this common question has been estimated several times yet with little precision. Researchers working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Emerging Infections Program: Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet) analyzed data from four 12-month population-based surveys to more accurately assess this burden. The findings of this analysis provide updated estimates of the prevalence of acute diarrheal illness in the United States.

From June 1996 to February 2003, FoodNet conducted four different 12-month sets of telephone interviews of people living in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, and Tennessee. Approximately 150 persons were interviewed each month from each state. Respondents were asked questions about their demographic characteristics, health status, diarrheal illness and symptoms, and contact with health care providers. Acute diarrheal illness was defined as  $\geq 3$  loose stools in a 24 hour period. The questions about health pertained to the month period before the interview. Some of the questions varied slightly from year to year.

Overall, 5.1% of the 52,840 respondents reported having a diarrheal episode in the month before the interview. Those respondents aged  $\geq 55$  years and 5-17 years reported rates of acute diarrheal illness lower than those respondents 36-54 years of age; however,  $< 5$  year olds had the highest rates. Acute diarrheal illness rates were higher among women than men and lower among blacks than whites. Among those respondents with acute diarrheal illness, 33.8% also reported

vomiting, 19.5% had visited a health care provider, and 7.8% took an antibiotic. The rates of acute diarrheal illness were similar in the four cycles of the survey.

In the US, people experience approximately 0.6 episodes of acute diarrheal illness each year. This represents a huge burden on the health-care system. There has been little change in this estimate since FoodNet began surveys of acute diarrheal illness.