

Public Health Mission

This module covers an overview of the essentials of a public health regulatory agency. FSIS is a public health regulatory agency.

OBJECTIVE

After completing this module, you will be able to:

1. Describe what makes FSIS a public health regulatory agency.
2. Describe your role as a Food Inspector in FSIS.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

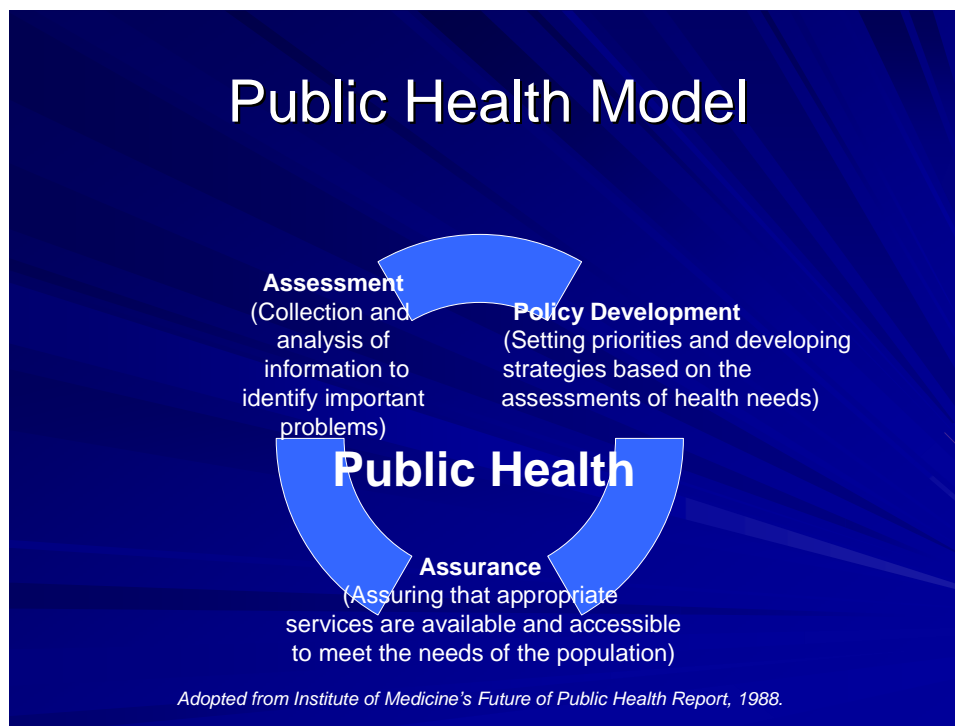
- A Description of the U.S. Food Safety System
- Food Safety: A Team Approach
- Milestones in U.S. Food and Drug Law History

The Public Health Model

There are some key features of a public health agency. These features are outlined in the public health model. This model applies to all types of public health institutions – such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) – as well as to FSIS.

The 3 parts of the public health model are:

- Assessment
- Policy Development; and
- Assurance.



The Assessment component:

The assessment component is focused on gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data about public health problems using science. Some examples of the activities in FSIS related to assessment include surveillance, identifying needs, analyzing the causes of problems, collecting and interpreting data, case-finding, monitoring and forecasting trends, research, and evaluation of outcomes. The part of FSIS that has primary responsibility for assessment in FSIS is the Office of Public Health and Science, or OPHS. However, you will do some of this in your daily work as well.

The Policy Development component:

A second component of a public health agency is the policy development function. This function uses information from the assessments to develop and implement policies that reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses. Some examples of policy development activities include planning and priority-setting, the development of regulations, directives and other policy vehicles, mobilizing resources, training, constituency building and distribution of public information, and encouragement of public and private sector cooperation. The Office of Policy, Program and Employee Development has the major responsibility for policy development in FSIS. Some examples of policy documents and policy guidance include regulations, Directives, and Notices. When there is an emerging issue affecting public health, such as the discovery of a cow that tested positive for BSE in January of 2004, FSIS must develop a policy that responds to that issue. Therefore, FSIS policies are dynamic and change to meet the challenges facing public health. You will be responsible for carrying out the policies in your day to day activities. .

The Assurance component:

The assurance component of a public health agency is responsible for the implementation of legislative mandates as well as statutory responsibilities. In FSIS, we do this through a strong inspection program. We must assure the American public that the USDA mark of inspection found on meat, poultry, and egg products means what it says – that product is safe, wholesome, and properly labeled. The Office of Field Operations (OFO) has the primary role for assurance in FSIS. You, as a Food Inspector, are assigned to work within OFO.

Overview of the Role of AM/PM Inspection in Food Safety Strategy

As a Food Inspector, you will be working as a member of a team. The job you perform is sometimes called “on-line” inspection. That’s because you will stand on the slaughter line to inspect carcasses and parts. Your other FSIS team members work off-line, or off the slaughter line. They include the Consumer Safety Inspectors and the IIC.

In 1996, FSIS published the Pathogen Reduction HACCP Systems final rule. The rule established the following requirements for establishments.

- Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOPs), and Sanitation Performance Standards
- Generic *E. coli* testing by establishments
- Hazard analysis and HACCP plan
- Pathogen reduction performance standards for *Salmonella*. This testing is done by FSIS off-line personnel.

Ante mortem inspection

During ante mortem inspection, inspection personnel observe all livestock at rest and in motion. Any animals that exhibit abnormalities are segregated for further examination by the Public Health Veterinarian (PHV). In livestock post mortem inspection, PHVs examine all animals that have been segregated for abnormalities. Based on the

disposition of the PHV, the livestock are either condemned, tagged as U.S. Suspects, or passed for slaughter.

For poultry ante mortem inspection, the birds are observed in their coops. Abnormal flocks are segregated and either condemned or withheld from slaughter.

Ante mortem inspection is our first line of defense. Through ante mortem inspection, some diseases are detected that cannot be detected during post mortem inspection.

Post mortem inspection

In poultry slaughter, you will perform a sequence of inspection procedures on each carcass, including the viscera of the bird. You will retain birds with abnormal conditions for disposition by the PHV.

In livestock post mortem inspection, you will examine each carcass and the parts. In livestock post mortem inspection, you perform a special sequence of inspection procedures. In large plants, there is more than one inspection station, and you may rotate through each station. The carcass, its viscera, and the head of livestock must be inspected. When you observe an abnormality, you retain the carcass or part so that the PHV can make a final disposition on the carcass or part.

Any carcass or part that is trimmed or handled in some way by the establishment to remove a disease or condition is subject to reinspection. The reinspection of the carcass or its parts is usually done by off-line inspection personnel.

Post mortem inspection can detect food safety defects, such as fecal contamination. It can also detect quality defects known as other consumer protection.

Roles in Post Mortem Inspection

Your role will be to inspect each carcass along with heads (if it is livestock slaughter) and viscera on the slaughter line. You will be focusing on product as you look at each carcass. But you may be able to detect trends. One of the most important roles you play is to communicate with the off-line inspection personnel when you observe a contaminated or abnormal carcass or part.

The off-line inspection personnel focus on verifying that the establishment is maintaining process control. The Inspector In Charge (IIC) will make an assessment of the overall system. The IIC will also monitor and determine the effectiveness of FSIS carcass and verification inspection.

When you notice a trend in defects, you must notify the off-line inspectors. Later, you'll learn that the conditions under which you notify the off-line inspectors have to do with problems with presentation, sanitary dressing of the carcasses, and contamination.

When you notify the off-line inspectors, they will check downstream – or farther down the slaughter line – to investigate whether the establishment is taking action to address the condition you are reporting.

So, to summarize, you have learned the key features of a public health agency can be found in the public health model. The 3 parts of the public health model are Assessment, Policy Development and Assurance. FSIS accomplishes assurance through a strong inspection program.

As the on-line inspector, you will detect individual defects and trends. Your findings will trigger the off-line inspectors to review the establishment's process control systems. Remember that you are our first line of defense to protect public health. You are very important part of the food safety team.