



FDA: Tracking, Tracing and Testing Tomatoes

On May 30th FDA was first notified by the CDC of a group of patients made ill by a type of bacteria called salmonella. Since that time, hundreds of FDA experts have been working around the clock and established that the infection resulted from eating specific types of tomatoes. Illnesses have occurred now in 228 people across 23 states. We have not identified the specific farms or locations where the infected tomatoes came from, but we have identified many sources producing tomatoes that are quite safe as well as specific types of tomatoes that can be consumed without any concern. All this information is contained here on our website.

My take on the challenges with identifying the source of the bad tomatoes is that while the FDA of today is proactively living up to the challenges of detecting and responding to food illness, we can do better. We can do better by taking a lesson from the fire department. The best way to deal with fires is to foster programs that prevent them from ever happening in the first place. But lightning can strike or someone unintentionally or intentionally will cause a fire. At that moment we must also have the best rapid response and state-of-the-art effective interventions.

This is the approach FDA is taking but we must accelerate our progress in implementing these programs of prevention, intervention and response. FDA's Food Protection Plan, which we released in November 2007, contains a number of initiatives to increase product safety even when fresh fruit and produce like tomatoes comes from beyond our borders, and when producing such ready-to-eat products

as fresh-cut-and washed salad in a bag increases the complexities of food processing and distribution.

This week I had the opportunity to visit FDA's Pacific Regional Lab Southwest, our newest state-of-the-art facility and a major food testing and research facility where sophisticated scientific tools can be used to identify problems like the salmonella contamination. I met with state and local officials as well as leaders of the industry to discuss ways to improve our prevention, intervention and response efforts, especially the use of modern technologies to track and trace the bacteria contaminated food from a restaurant or the patient's refrigerator all the way back to the field in which it was grown so we can halt the source of the problem.

Going forward, we must focus on science-based preventive measures throughout the entire food supply chain and the life cycle of the food product. FDA will constantly strive to use new and more modern tools

whether in the lab or in the field to be even better tomorrow than yesterday. To do this requires resources.

This week, President Bush submitted to Congress a request to amend his FY 09 budget to add \$275 million to the FDA budget so that we can address these emerging new challenges and opportunities. Previously, I had responded to a request from Senator Specter for my professional estimate regarding needed resources. Senators Kohl and Bennett immediately proposed to the Appropriation Committee that \$275 million be added to the Supplemental Bill so that FDA could have immediate access to needed resources. The President's budget request will be acted upon some time later this year while the House and Senate will be considering this supplemental appropriation over the next few days to weeks. FDA is grateful to the Senate and the President and Secretary Leavitt for their leadership in proposing these additional resources to equip the FDA to prevent, intervene and rapidly respond to any threat to your health.

Now I invite you to stay tuned and listen to Dr. Steve Sundlof, head of the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition at FDA, as he will give you the recent details of the tomato outbreak. [FDA](#)

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