Partnering with WHO

WHO collaborates with a wide range of partners in various fields of activities. Beyond public health, WHO works with global and regional partners, including those active in agriculture and animal health to address food safety issues along the entire food chain from production to consumption. Collaboration goes on with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

WHO aims at:
• developing new collaborations and partnership, including with sectors outside the usual food safety arena
• expanding its network of partners involved in capacity building (e.g. WHO Collaborating Centres)
• encouraging donors to support food standards development and food safety capacity building in Member States

Contacting us

Institutions or individuals interested in working with WHO in Food Safety should contact the Director of the Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses (FOS), World Health Organization, Avenue Appia, 20, 1201 Geneva 27 - Switzerland
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Food Safety: A public health priority

A safe food supply supports national economy, trade and tourism, contributes to food and nutrition security, and stimulates sustainable development.

Unsafe food causes many diseases, ranging from diarrhoeal diseases to various forms of cancer. Foodborne disease outbreaks have devastating health and economic impacts in both developed and developing countries. The rapid spread of pathogen and contaminants in food across national borders is putting global health security at risk.

WHO aims to achieve a world capable of preventing, detecting and responding to public health threats associated with unsafe food.

Leading global efforts to lower the burden of foodborne diseases

The Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses (FOS) strengthens health security and promotes sustainable development of Member States.

What we do

FOS, in close collaboration with the WHO Regional and Country Offices, assists Member States to develop food safety policies and successfully implement risk-based foodborne disease surveillance, prevention and control programmes.

1. Provide the scientific base for measures along the entire food chain to decrease foodborne health risks

WHO is in a unique position to develop independent international scientific advice. This advice forms the basis for international food standards, guidelines, recommendations (Codex Alimentarius), and policy options. These serve as a foundation for prevention and control systems along the food chain in and between Member States.

2. Improve international and national cross-sectoral collaboration, and enhance communication and advocacy

WHO advocates for food safety as an important component of health security, and for integration of food safety into national policies and programmes to protect public health in line with the International Health Regulations (IHR). WHO promotes cross-sector collaboration among public health, animal health, agriculture and other sectors so that everyone communicates and acts together.

3. Provide leadership and assist in the development and strengthening of risk-based, integrated national systems for food safety

WHO supports Member States to analyse and improve their food systems and legal framework, implementing adequate infrastructures (e.g. laboratories) and increasing their capacity to respond to and manage food safety risks, including during emergencies.

Areas of works

- Foodborne diseases
- Food hygiene
- Food technologies
- Microbiological risks
- Chemical risks
- International food standards (Codex Alimentarius)
- International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN)
- Antimicrobial resistance from the food chain
- Zoonoses and intersectoral collaboration at animal-human-ecosystems interface

The overall FOS approach and 3 strategic directions are developed in the Strategic Plan for Food Safety, including Foodborne Zoonoses for 2013-2022 (www.who.int/foodsafety)

Foodborne diseases

- 600 million cases
- Almost 1 out of 10 people fall ill after eating contaminated food
- 420 000 children die
- 40% of the foodborne disease burden
- 125 000 deaths