

Food Poisoning Report Shows Fewer Salmonella Cases

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In this Monday, Sept. 12, 2013 file photo, an oyster cultivator holds oyster seed before spreading it into the waters of Duxbury Bay in Duxbury, Mass. A Thursday, April 17, 2014 report from the Centers of Disease Control says there was an increase in infections from vibrio bacteria found in raw shellfish. In 2013, cases were up 32 percent from the previous three years and 75 percent from about five years ago. But the numbers remain very small - only 242 of the 20,000 foodborne illnesses recorded in 10 states. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia)

NEW YORK (AP) — The government's latest report card on food poisoning shows a dip in salmonella cases but an increase in illnesses from bacteria in raw shellfish. The report counts cases in only 10 states for some of the most common causes of foodborne illness, but is believed to be a good indicator of national food poisoning trends. Highlights from Thursday's report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

WHAT'S MAKING US SICK?

Salmonella remains at the top of the chart, far ahead of most other foodborne germs. Only campylobacter — a bacteria commonly linked to raw milk and poultry — comes close. Other causes, listeria, shigella and E. coli, trail behind.

IS FOOD POISONING GETTING WORSE?

Overall, no. Last year, there were no significant changes in most kinds of food poisoning, compared to the previous three years. The new report tallied about 20,000 illnesses and 80 deaths in the 10 states, similar to previous years. The CDC estimates that 1 in 6 Americans get sick from contaminated food each year, though most cases are not reported.

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Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

ANY GOOD NEWS?

Yes, for salmonella. The rate of new cases dropped 9 percent — the biggest drop in about a decade. But officials are cautious about making too much of it, since it was compared to a time period that included a big outbreak linked to eggs in 2010. Last year's rate is similar to what it was about five years ago. CDC officials hope new regulatory proposals, like one to prevent salmonella in chicken parts, will keep pushing rates down.

WHAT ABOUT BAD NEWS?

There was an increase in infections from vibrio (VIB'-ree-oh) bacteria found in raw shellfish, like oysters. Last year, cases were up 32 percent from the previous three years and 75 percent from about five years ago. But the numbers remain very small — only 242 of the 20,000 illnesses recorded in the 10 states. Climate change is warming coastal waters in some places, and that may be helping spread some vibrio strains to new locations, said Dr. Robert Tauxe, a CDC food-germ expert. "The warmer the water, the more vibrio," he said. A strain traditionally found in the Pacific Northwest, is now showing up along the East Coast. Tauxe said it might have been spread through water in ships' ballast tanks.

CAN YOU PREVENT FOOD POISONING?

Carefully wash and clean food, and cook meat, poultry and eggs thoroughly. Avoid raw milk and unpasteurized juices. Promptly refrigerate leftovers. A government report last year showed leafy greens like lettuce and spinach were the leading source of food poisoning, and produce in general accounted for nearly half of all illnesses. There were slightly more deaths attributed to poultry than to vegetables in the decade studied.

Source URL (retrieved on 04/26/2015 - 7:39pm):

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2014/04/food-poisoning-report-shows-fewer-salmonella-cases>