

Key facts

Access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food is **key to survival and good health**.

Unsafe food containing harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemicals, causes more than **200 diseases**—ranging from diarrhoea to cancers.

Every year in the WHO Western Pacific Region, **125 million** people become ill and **50,000** die from consuming unsafe food. **30%** of illnesses are in children under the age of five.

In addition to being an important health issue, food safety is an issue for **trade and economic development**.

The context of food safety is changing, making food safety risk management **more complex and challenging**.

Food safety is fundamental for good health and it is essential for sustainable development. Health and food safety are intrinsically related and improving food safety is vital to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Everyone must eat, so everyone is exposed to food safety risks. However, **the poor and most vulnerable are most exposed and at greatest risk of foodborne disease**. Diarrhoea is the most common foodborne illness, but other serious consequences include kidney and liver failure, brain disorders and death. Unsafe food may also cause noncommunicable diseases, in particular cancers, and can also affect reproductive health and the immune system. In 2010, the Western Pacific Region accounted for approximately 21% of the global foodborne illnesses and 12% of the global deaths. Aflatoxin and Chinese liver fluke are the two main causes of death in the Region, while norovirus, non-typhoidal salmonella and campylobacter are the most common disease-causing agents, accounting for nearly 45% of all foodborne illnesses in the Region.

Unsafe food not only adversely affects people's health and well-being, **it also has negative economic consequences** for individuals, families, businesses and countries. In the last 10 years in the Western Pacific Region, trade in food and live animals has more than doubled and increased the risk of unsafe food spreading across borders. Food safety risks cannot be eliminated, but they can be reduced with appropriate risk management measures along the entire food chain—from farm to plate. This may include adherence to good food hygiene practices, development and implementation of food policies and legislation, risk-based inspection programmes, communications and education activities and emergency response. Food safety is a responsibility shared among stakeholders including government, businesses and consumers.

In recent years, technological advances, demographic changes and socio-economic developments have affected work on food safety in the Western Pacific Region. The changing context of food safety has made food safety risk management and response to food safety incidents and emergencies more complex and challenging. The multisectoral nature of food safety—involving agriculture, health, education, trade and others—requires a multisectoral response with leadership and mechanisms for working together across sectors, stakeholders and national borders.

WHO response

WHO provides strategic guidance and technical support to Member States to **strengthen national food safety systems**. This includes assistance with: policy and legal frameworks; risk-based food inspection and enforcement; information underpinning evidence; incidents and emergency response; and communications and education.

WHO facilitates regional cooperation for **effectively managing food safety risks and responding to food safety incidents and emergencies**. The *Regional Framework for Action on Food Safety in the Western Pacific* will enhance regional cooperation by tracking progress, setting common priorities, and sharing experiences for learning and continuous improvement in food safety systems.

WHO positions food safety as an important component of health security and sustainable development. This includes providing technical support to assist countries achieve the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005 core capacities for food safety, and strengthening the linkages between IHR and the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN).

