Foodborne Illness Reduction Strategy 2018-2021+

A risk management approach to foodborne illness reduction – focusing on *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*

Executive Summary

About foodborne illness and microbiological risk

Maintaining the safety of our food supply is an important function of government and the food industry alike. A significant component of this function is controlling hazards that arise from pathogens – microorganisms that cause foodborne illness. The food industry and governments implement many regulatory and non-regulatory measures to manage reduction of pathogens.

The value of having a coordinated Strategy enables stakeholders to work and communicate together to minimise microbiological risk. This approach focuses on consumers and how the potential health of the food they consume should be managed by risk measures in the food supply chain.

This Strategy is designed to reduce rates of foodborne illness. To put this into context, in 2016 the rate of salmonellosis due to *S.* Typhimurium was 31 human cases per 100 000 population and the rate of campylobacteriosis was 128 cases per 100 000 population. This was an increase from the five-year average rates from the period 2011 to 2015 (17 cases per 100 000 population for *S.*Typhimurium and 96 cases per 100 000 population for campylobacteriosis).

Food system in Western Australia

This Strategy involves a statewide approach and includes many stakeholders. Reducing foodborne illness is a responsibility that transcends many areas of policy including economic development, biosecurity, agriculture, outbreak response, community safety, planning and food safety.

The core elements of this Strategy fit closely into the food regulatory system of which the Department of Health plays the role of statewide system manager. This is a coordination role involving oversight and dialogue with other government agencies, the food industry and members of the public.

The WA food regulatory system is modelled from a bi-national system that promotes consistency in the governance of public health and the food industry. This system is supported by the *Food Act 2008* (Food Act), *Food Regulations 2009* (Food Regulations) and the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (Food Standards Code). The purpose of the Food Act is to provide for the safety and suitability of food for human consumption, and the onus to comply with this Act sits with food businesses; while monitoring is an important role facilitated by local governments. The outcome-based Food Standards Code set standards for food businesses and is based on evidence including foodborne illness risks.

This Strategy falls within the scope of this system and considers management tools that are not explicitly detailed in the Food Act, such as stakeholder engagement and consumer awareness. An across-Government group comprising of the Department of Health, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and local governments has been formed to support the development and implementation of this Strategy.

What is a risk management approach?

Risk management forms the basis of this Strategy. This is because foodborne illness affects public health, economic, reputational and compliance risk of both governments and food businesses. These different types of risks are intrinsically linked – reduced levels of illness can improve health outcomes, reduce health costs, increase productivity, improve the way governments and food businesses are viewed and demonstrate better compliance outcomes.

The four principles of this Strategy form the overarching risk management tools for managing foodborne illness. They are designed to ensure risk is managed through detection, response, monitoring, communication, research, planning and review.

Aim of this Strategy

Implement a coordinated approach across the WA food supply chain, from paddock to plate, to control foodborne pathogens and reduce the level of foodborne illness.

By 2021, the number of human cases of foodborne illness will be reduced*

Strategy Risk Management Principles

This aim will be delivered by applying principles that follow a risk management approach. The principles of this strategy are:

1. **Surveillance and Monitoring**

   Enhance regulatory and non-regulatory monitoring and surveillance programs to ensure effective through chain detection and management of risks

2. **Stakeholder Engagement and Awareness**

   Implement a holistic statewide approach to foodborne illness by engaging and educating stakeholders

3. **Policy and Networking**

   Actively form and participate in national and statewide policy forums and industry networks; and implement agreed policy outcomes

4. **Research, Science and Epidemiology**

   Build a stronger evidence base for ongoing management of foodborne illness and improve knowledge sharing of evidence

Scope

The principles will be delivered through a series of targeted 'Implementation Plans' prioritising food-health risks associated with foodborne illness. This includes reducing salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis by examining and addressing causes, investigating other causes of foodborne illness and managing trends that may emerge during the lifetime of the Strategy.

*Reduction targets will be specified in the Implementation Plans.

Who does this Strategy apply to?

Consumers

Safe food supply and handling is an important public health outcome relevant to all Western Australians. As well as improving public health, reducing levels of foodborne illness in the community can also reduce costs to the health system, employers and consumers.

It is the responsibility of the food industry and the government to work together to raise awareness to consumers of food safety and handling through various media. These messages should be updated regularly to ensure public education reflects current risks and food behaviours.

Local Government and Auditors

WA's 139 local governments have a key role to monitor food safety across more than 22,000 food businesses. The Strategy will support professional development of local government authorised officers to improve their understanding of foodborne illness reduction, compliance and monitoring tools.

Local governments monitor compliance with all chapters of the Food Standards Code including the food safety standards and primary production and processing standards. Many of these standards have been developed to control pathogens in the food industry.

Risks are monitored in some higher risk food sectors by auditors as well as local governments.

Food Industry

This Strategy follows a whole-of-chain approach to food safety, from primary production through to manufacturing, retail and food service (i.e. catering, restaurants and cafés).

Principles will be implemented to address risks in each sector and across different food commodities, particular animal based foods, from where most foodborne pathogens originate.

The first two priorities of this Strategy will be to address the food-health risk relationships of *Salmonella* and eggs; and *Campylobacter* and poultry meat.

It is equally important risk mechanisms are in place to manage foodborne pathogens for other higher risk food sectors like horticulture, meat, dairy and seafood.

It is essential the food sectors closest to the consumer, like retailers and food service have a thorough working knowledge of food safety risk management to ensure pathogens do not unnecessarily multiply in this part of the food chain. Skills and knowledge in this industry are regularly assessed by local government.

State Government

Development and implementation of the Strategy is being steered by an across-government advisory group* steered by the Department of Health's Environmental Health Directorate (EHD). The EHD is responsible for managing the food regulatory system and leads and supports stakeholders who have a food safety role.

Surveillance of enteric diseases and epidemiological investigation of foodborne illness is performed by OzFoodNet, part of the Communicable Disease Control Directorate of the Department of Health. OzFoodNet informs foodborne illness reduction programs by providing descriptions of foodborne disease trends and evidence from outbreak investigations.

Input from an agricultural and economic development perspective is provided by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD). DPIRD's role is to grow and protect the agriculture and food sector through business facilitation and biosecurity activities that support trade such as animal health surveillance and diagnostics.

Also includes local government members.

Performance

Review

The implementation of this strategy will be regularly reviewed by the across-government advisory group, in consultation with stakeholders. A mid-term review of the core aim and principles will also occur in 2019.

Evaluation

The aim and principles will be evaluated and reported after the completion of the Strategy. Outcomes and key performance indicators in the Implementation Plans will be regularly assessed, evaluated and reported to the advisory group.

Systems

To assist with evaluation of the Implementation Plans, systems will be designed to enable effective sharing of appropriate information and data across government and in collaboration with the food industry.