

Canada's food safety system fails international comparisons

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Canada's food safety system is reactive, lags behind other countries, and investment is needed to ensure it can adequately protect Canadians, states an article in CMAJ (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

Foodborne illness surveillance is needed to ensure safety from gastrointestinal infections caused by bacteria such as toxigenic E.coli, Salmonella, Campylobacter and Listeria. As there is no national foodborne illness surveillance program in Canada, the estimated 11 million cases of foodborne illness every year are based on surveys of self-reported [gastrointestinal illness](#). More accurate data are needed to execute meaningful intervention.

European Union countries, the US and Australia have surveillance systems that allow them to collect information on food vehicles and organisms that cause foodborne illness, something Canada cannot currently do. Canada's multi-government system with national, provincial and local governments that share responsibility for health, as well as monitor the safety and quality of food are key reasons that we have a fragmented system with poor focus. The US suffers from the same problem, yet does a better (though not perfect) job.

"Multijurisdictional fragmentation of both food inspection and foodborne illness surveillance are obstacles to safe food that can be overcome with determination and commitment," writes Dr. Richard A Holley from the Department of Food Science at the University of Manitoba.

While Canada does have a single national food inspection authority, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, it shares responsibility for food inspection with provincial and municipal governments.

"The large size of the country, regional differences in population density and availability of infrastructure complicate attempts to implement and administer both foodborne illness surveillance and uniform food inspection programs," writes the author.

Government must invest to develop a proactively cooperative foodborne illness surveillance system and use the data to establish insightful, uniform, risk- and science-based [food safety](#) policy across the country.

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