

New tests could hamper food outbreak detection

December 11 2012, by Lauran Neergaard

It's about to get faster and easier to diagnose food poisoning. But there's a downside: It could make it harder to spot and solve dangerous outbreaks.

Next-generation tests that could reach medical labs as early as next year could shave a few days off the time needed to tell whether E. coli, salmonella or other [foodborne bacteria](#) caused an illness. That could allow doctors to treat diseases more quickly.

The problem is the new tests can't differentiate between bacteria subtypes. That fingerprint is what researchers use to identify the source of the [contaminated food](#).

Health officials that use the new [rapid tests](#) could still send samples to a lab so that the older, slower test also could be performed. But it's not clear who would pay for that extra step.

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