

CDC ranks foods most likely to make Americans sick

January 30 2013, by Amanda Gardner, Healthday Reporter



Contaminated leafy greens were biggest cause of illness, while meats caused more deaths.

(HealthDay)—Leafy green vegetables are responsible for more foodborne illnesses than any other food, according to a new government report.

But meat and poultry cause more deaths, according to the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) report published online Jan. 29 and in the March print issue of the journal [Emerging infectious Diseases](#).

Almost half (46 percent) of illnesses were traced back to produce, including fruits and nuts. Twenty-two percent were due to consuming leafy vegetables such as kale or spinach.

Dairy products were responsible for 14 percent of illnesses, fruits and

nuts for 12 percent, and poultry for 10 percent.

Meat—particularly poultry—was responsible for the most deaths, with 43 percent of all deaths estimated to have come from [land animals](#). Nineteen percent of deaths were due to poultry alone and mostly from [listeria](#) or salmonella.

Two years ago, the CDC published estimates on the number of foodborne illnesses acquired in the United States, including the number caused by each of the major pathogens, said study senior author Dr. Patricia Griffin, chief of the CDC's enteric diseases epidemiology branch.

According to that report, about 48 million people—or one in six in the United States each year—get food poisoning. More than 9 million of those cases are caused by one of the major pathogens tracked by the CDC.

"The next logical questions was, What categories of foods are causing these illnesses?" Griffin said. "Answers to these sorts of questions are important for regulatory agencies and for industry in figuring out how to target their resources."

This is the first time the CDC has tried to evaluate the actual [food sources](#) of [foodborne illnesses](#). The analysis is based on data from all outbreaks since 1998, the first year authorities started filing information on ingredients.

Norovirus was the main contaminant driving the illnesses, the study found. People carry this virus and they can pass it on if they don't wash their hands after using the toilet or vomiting and before handling food, Griffin said.

"It's a reminder that it's important for everybody who handles food both in restaurants and at home to wash your hands well before handling food," Griffin said.

Consumers should also make sure they wash leafy greens, such as lettuce, well before eating them, added Mary Ann Scharf, an associate professor in the Seton Hall University College of Nursing in South Orange, N.J.

Meat needs to be kept refrigerated and then cooked thoroughly before it is eaten, she added.

Make sure that any knives or cutting boards that have come into contact with poultry are thoroughly washed before they come into contact with fresh vegetables or other food, Scharf advised.

More information: The U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [food safety](#).

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