

**FLEXNEWS****:. Food Industry News****Categories: Food Safety****US Making Little Progress on Food Safety - CDC**

Source: Reuters

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Chicago, April 10 - Efforts to improve food safety in the United States have "plateaued," exposing the need for an overhaul of the nation's food safety system, government health officials said on Thursday.

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Despite work to improve food safety in recent years, the number of foodborne infections remained steady, with little change in the past few years, suggesting fundamental problems are not being solved.

"Progress has plateaued. This indicates to us that further measures are needed to prevent more foodborne illness," Dr. Robert Tauxe of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told reporters in a telephone briefing.

Overall, CDC identified 18,499 laboratory-confirmed cases of food poisoning in 2008 using FoodNet, a tracking system that looks at foodborne illness in 10 states, covering about 46 million people or 15 percent of the U.S. population.

"When we compared the year 2008 information with the three previous years -- 2005 to 2007 -- we see no significant change in the incidence of these infections," he said, noting that 2004 was the last year gains had been made at curbing infection rates.

Salmonella infections were the most commonly diagnosed and reported foodborne illnesses in 2008, and their numbers were essentially unchanged compared with data from 2005-2007.

The 2008 findings represent just a portion of the Salmonella Typhimurium infections caused by tainted peanuts and peanut products processed by the now bankrupt Peanut Corp of America, which has led to the biggest food recall in U.S. history.

The outbreak, which began in September, forced the recall of more than 3,200 products and sickened more than 680 people in 46 states, perhaps killing nine. A series of other incidents involving pistachios, lettuce, peppers and spinach have eroded public confidence in food safety and renewed calls for change.

**NEW APPROACH**

Dr. David Acheson, associate commissioner for foods at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration said the report "underscores the need for a change in approach."

"This change needs to address the safety problems around foods and really focus on how to prevent these problems in the first place," Acheson told reporters on the call.

He said the FDA was embarking on "an aggressive and proactive approach" aimed at protecting and enforcing the safety

of the food supply.

"Clearly we are working very closely with the new administration and Congress on addressing these issues."

Acheson said FDA has expanded its presence overseas and now has offices in China, Latin America, Europe and India, and plans to add more scientists, investigators and inspectors to help ensure food safety in the United States.

And he said FDA has set up rapid response teams in six states to help the agency react more quickly when an outbreak occurs, with plans to add more.

"I think it has become clear preventive controls are critical," he said.

The CDC estimates that each year 76 million Americans get food poisoning, more than 300,000 are sick enough to be hospitalized and 5,000 die.

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