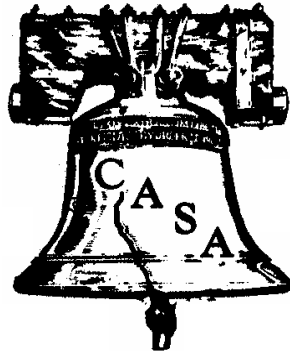


THE BELL RINGER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PHILADELPHIA CONFERENCE OF THE
CENTRAL ATLANTIC STATES ASSOCIATION OF FOOD AND DRUG

WINTER 2006



THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Once again, our holiday meeting is fast approaching. This meeting should be of interest to all members. The morning topics will involve current updates on food security measures. The afternoon will be a satellite downlink on reducing risk factors in the retail food industry. As always, please remember to bring only canned foods for our annual food drive, which we will donate to the Philadelphia Food Bank.

Unfortunately, I must announce that the Philadelphia Conference will be losing one of its greatest assets. As some of you may already be aware, George Zameska, who is the Philadelphia Conference Representative to the Executive Board, will be leaving the conference to start a new job. George was an invaluable asset to the conference. He not only was the Executive Board Representative but was also the chairperson of the Constitution and By-Law Committee. As a representative of the Executive Board and all conference members, I would like to take this opportunity to thank George for all his hard work and wish him well in all his future endeavors. The Executive Board has appointed Howard Rabinovitch to fill this position. However, an election will be held for this position as prescribed by the C.A.S.A. constitution and by-laws.

We are always looking for members to become involved with committees. Since there are numerous committees to choose from, one of them may be of interest to you. If you would like to become involved on any committee or would like further information on the different committees, please feel free to e-mail me at bernard.finkel@phila.gov. Lastly, if you cross paths with someone who might find our organization useful, please refer them to anyone on the Executive Board or the C.A.S.A website (www.casafdo.org) for further information. Hoping to see everyone at the meeting, but to those who can't attend [Happy Holidays to all and their families!](#)



*Sincerely,
Bernie Finkel*

FDA Notifies Consumers that Tomatoes in Restaurants Linked to *Salmonella* Typhimurium Outbreak

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) today announced the results of an investigation by states and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) investigators, which found consuming tomatoes in restaurants as the cause of illnesses in the *Salmonella* Typhimurium outbreak. To date, 21 states have reported 183 cases of illnesses to the CDC.

Salmonella can cause serious and sometimes fatal infections in young children, frail or elderly people, and others with weakened immune systems. Healthy persons often experience fever, diarrhea (which may be bloody), nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain. In rare circumstances, infection can result in the organism getting into the bloodstream and producing more severe illnesses.

Based on information currently available from the CDC, the investigation shows a peak in cases of illness in late September. This suggests that the outbreak is not ongoing. The agency believes that the tomatoes that caused the illnesses have at this point been consumed, destroyed or thrown out because they are perishable. Therefore, FDA does not believe a consumer warning about tomatoes on store shelves is warranted at this time.

FDA has initiated a traceback of these tomatoes and continues its close collaboration with the CDC and state and local authorities to identify the source of contamination on tomatoes in this outbreak. In particular, FDA is working closely with the states of Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, since groups of illnesses were specifically reported in these states.

Investigations of foodborne illness usually begin at the local health department level. A variety of scientific and technological methods to trace the source of reported illnesses are used. Modern technologies, such as PulseNet (the network of public health laboratories that performs "DNA fingerprinting"), have greatly improved the speed and precision of these types of investigations.

In light of recent outbreaks, FDA continues to emphasize consumer advice to reduce the risk of foodborne illness, including *Salmonella*-related illness, from fresh produce:

Buying Tips for Fresh Produce

- Purchase produce that is not bruised or damaged.
- When selecting fresh cut produce - such as a half a watermelon or bagged mixed salad greens - choose only those items that are refrigerated or surrounded by ice.
- Bag fresh fruits and vegetables separately from meat, poultry and seafood products when packing them to take home from the market.

Storage Tips for Fresh Produce

- Certain perishable fresh fruits and vegetables (like strawberries, lettuce, herbs, and mushrooms) can be best maintained by storing in a clean refrigerator at a temperature of 40° F or below. If you're not sure whether an item should be refrigerated to maintain quality, ask your grocer.
- All produce that is purchased pre-cut or peeled should be refrigerated within two hours to maintain both quality and safety.

Federal News Continued

- Keep your refrigerator set at 40° F or below. Use a refrigerator thermometer to check!

Preparation Tips for Fresh Produce

- Many pre-cut, bagged produce items like lettuce are pre-washed. If so, it will be stated on the packaging. This pre-washed, bagged produce can be used without further washing.
- As an extra measure of caution, you can wash the produce again just before you use it. Precut or prewashed produce in open bags should be washed before using.
- Begin with clean hands. Wash your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after preparing fresh produce.
- Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on fresh fruits and vegetables before preparing and/or eating. Produce that looks rotten should be discarded.
- All unpackaged fruits and vegetables, as well as those packaged and not marked pre-washed, should be thoroughly washed before eating. This includes produce grown conventionally or organically at home, or produce that is purchased from a grocery store or farmer's market. Wash fruits and vegetables under running water just before eating, cutting or cooking.
- Even if you plan to peel the produce before eating, it is still important to wash it first.
- Washing fruits and vegetables with soap or detergent or using commercial produce washes is not recommended.

- Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush.
- Drying produce with a clean cloth towel or paper towel may further reduce bacteria that may be present.

Separate for Safety

Keep fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw separate from other foods, such as raw meat, poultry or seafood - and from kitchen utensils used for those products.

In addition, be sure to:

- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot water and soap between the preparation of raw meat, poultry and seafood products and the preparation of produce that will not be cooked.
- For added protection, kitchen sanitizers can be used on cutting boards and counter tops periodically. Try a solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach to one quart of water.
- If you use plastic or other non-porous cutting boards, run them through the dishwasher after use.



Noteworthy News

Salmonellosis Outbreak Investigation

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with state departments of health and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), is investigating an outbreak of infections caused by a type of *Salmonella* called *Salmonella typhimurium*. This infection has no relationship to typhoid fever, which is caused by another organism. *Salmonella typhimurium* typically causes an illness with fever and non-bloody diarrhea which commonly resolves after about one week. This illness is different from that caused by *E. coli* O157:H7, which produces bloody diarrhea, severe cramps, and in some persons, severe kidney disease. PulseNet, the network of public health laboratories that performs molecular subtyping (“DNA fingerprinting”) on bacteria that cause foodborne illnesses, has identified a specific strain of *Salmonella typhimurium* that has caused this outbreak. Cases caused by the specific strain have been detected regularly at low frequency (average , 86 cases per year) for the past 5 years, indicating the presence of this strain at low levels in the environment and the food chain. The outbreak has involved 171 cases of infection by this strain in 19 states reported since September 1, 2006. The median age of patients is 36 years, and 59% are female. As with most infections caused by *Salmonella*, most patients had a febrile diarrheal illness. Of 73 patients for whom clinical data has been reported, 14 (19%) were hospitalized; there have been no deaths reported. At this time few new cases are being detected, and there is little evidence of continuing risk to the public.

CDC and its public health partners are vigorously working to identify the specific contaminated food or foods that caused this outbreak. Outbreaks from a widely distributed contaminated food cause

cases to be scattered across the country, and the identity of the contaminated food is often not readily apparent. In outbreaks like this one, identification of the contaminated food requires conducting detailed standardized interviews with recovering case-patients and with non-ill members of the public (“controls”) to compare the foods they had eaten. Using statistical methods, the contaminated food is identified as one eaten more commonly by case-patients than the controls. This statistically-based method of identifying contaminated foods is routinely supplemented and confirmed by laboratory testing of foods and subsequent DNA fingerprinting of suspected bacterial isolates. The process is labor intensive and may require days to weeks. As soon as the contaminated food is identified, if there is evidence of ongoing risk, public health officials can advise the public to avoid it, and ensure that the food product is removed from the marketplace.

Precise information on avoiding infection with the outbreak strain of *Salmonella* will be provided by CDC as soon as the contaminated food(s) is identified. Members of the public are urged to follow several practices for reducing the risk of foodborne illness. See [Salmonellosis Frequently Asked Questions](#) for information. Persons with immune-compromising conditions should consider following specific precautions.

Date: 1 November, 2006

Content source: Coordinating Center for Infectious Diseases / Division of Bacterial and Mycotic Diseases



Noteworthy News Continued

Mail Order Food Safety

Convenience means many things to many people, but anything that helps save time is always high on everyone's list of conveniences. With more Americans working and being more time-crunched than ever, the ultimate time saver and convenience is home delivery of mail order foods.

While the mail order industry enjoys a good safety record, ordering food through the mail may cause concerns about food safety, shelf life, and distribution. It's imperative to develop some mental checklists for how both food and packaging should look when perishable mail order foods arrive. This is especially true for meat, poultry, fish, and other perishable foods such as cheesecake, which must be carefully handled in a timely manner to prevent foodborne illness.

The following food safety tips will help the purchaser and recipient determine if their perishable foods have been handled properly:

- Make sure the company sends perishable items, like meat or poultry, cold or frozen and packed with a cold source. It should be packed in foam or heavy corrugated cardboard.
- The food should be delivered as quickly as possible — ideally, **overnight**. Make sure perishable items and the outer package are labeled "Keep Refrigerated" to alert the recipient.
- When you receive a food item marked "Keep Refrigerated," open it immediately and check its temperature. The food should arrive frozen or partially frozen with ice crystals still visible. Even if a

product is smoked, cured, and/or fully cooked, it still is a perishable product and must be kept cold. If perishable food arrives warm — above 40 °F as measured with a food thermometer — notify the company. **Do not consume the food. Do not even taste suspect food.**

- Tell the recipient if the company has promised a delivery date. Or alert the recipient that "the gift is in the mail" so someone can be there to receive it. Don't have perishable items delivered to an office unless you know it will arrive on a work day and there is refrigerator space available for keeping it cold.

Americans also enjoy cooking foods that are family favorites and mailing these items to family and friends. The same rules that cover the mail order industry also apply to foods prepared and mailed from home. Make sure perishable foods are not held at temperatures between 40 and 140 °F, the "Danger Zone", for longer than 2 hours. Pathogenic bacteria can grow rapidly in the "Danger Zone", but they may not affect the taste, smell, or appearance of a food. In other words, you cannot tell that a food has been mishandled or is unsafe to eat.

For perishable foods prepared at home and mailed, follow these guidelines:

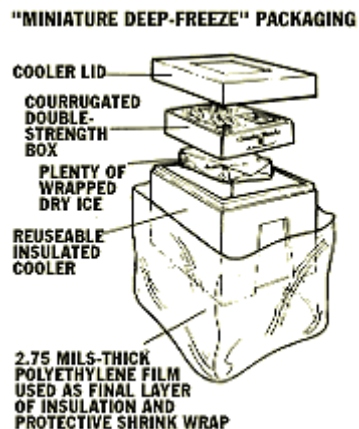
- Ship in a sturdy box.
- Pack with a cold source, i.e., frozen gel packs or dry ice.
- When using dry ice:
 - Don't touch the dry ice with bare hands.
 - Don't let it come in direct contact with food.

Noteworthy News Continued

- Warn the recipient of its use by writing "Contains Dry Ice" on the outside of the box.
- Wrap box in two layers of brown paper.
- Use permanent markers to label outside of the box. Use recommended packing tape.
- Label outside clearly; make sure address is complete and correct.
- Write "Keep Refrigerated" on outside of the box.
- Alert recipient of its expected arrival.
- Do not send to business addresses or where there will not be adequate refrigerator storage.
- Do not send packages at the end of the week. Send them at the beginning of the week so they do not sit in the post office or mailing facility over the weekend.
- Whenever possible, send foods that do not require refrigeration, e.g., hard salami, hard cheese, country ham.

The illustration (reprinted from *Food News for Consumers*, Holidays 1988) is an example of a safe way to ship perishable foods.

Use the handy [chart](#), compiled by the USDA



Meat and Poultry Hotline and FDA Outreach and Information Center, to plan your purchase, send a home-prepared item, and store popular mail order foods. If mail order foods arrive in a questionable condition, you may contact the following organizations for help:

- USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-MPHotline, weekdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (1-888-674-6854) (meat, poultry, and egg products)
- FDA Outreach and Information Center 1 (888) 723-3366 weekdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (any foods other than meat, poultry, and egg products)

Direct Marketing Association, Consumer Affairs Department, 1111 19th Street NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20036

Direct Marketing Association (DMA) offers a free consumer service and acts as an intermediary between consumers and direct marketing companies to resolve complaints on a timely basis. Consumers may register complaints with DMA by writing to the above address or e-mailing to Consumer@the-DMA.org; phone calls are not accepted.

Consumers requesting assistance through DMA should include the complete name and address of the company involved in the complaint, photocopies (not originals) of any canceled checks, order forms, other relevant documents, and a letter summarizing the facts of the complaint.

DMA will refer the letter to the company on the consumer's behalf and ask that the company resolve the matter. The majority of DMA complaints are resolved successfully within a 30-day period.



From the Editor

Well it is already time for the Holidays and most of us will be very busy preparing for holiday gatherings. As you know we are continuing our efforts to encourage participation in the Bell Ringer, so if you have a story idea, an announcement, or information, please email it to me at palak.raval-nelson@phila.gov. Also, feel free to provide feedback on the articles in the issues or write a letter to the Editor. Lastly, space is available for advertising in the Bell Ringer, just send me the information in an email and I will contact you. I look forward to your feedback and participation. I wish you and yours a happy and safe holiday season.

Tentative Schedule of Meetings

Winter: November 30, 2006

Spring: March 16, 2007

Annual Conference: May 15 to 17 2007

JOB OPPORTUNITY:

**Wawa Beverage Co (Wawa Dairy) Quality Assurance Manager
Job Requisition 2006-094**

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**Make sure to
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[http://www.casafdo.
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**Hey, do you know some
one that would make a
great CASA member?**

**Bring them to a meeting!
Tell them about CASA!
Get them to join!**