



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



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PREVENTING FOOD SAFETY EMERGENCIES: INFOSAN, FAO/WHO INTERNATIONAL FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITIES NETWORK

Foodborne diseases are common throughout the world, placing a significant burden on public health and often disrupting trade. The rapid globalization of food production and trade, combined with the growing complexity of the food chain, means that risks posed

by unsafe foods have the potential to quickly evolve from a local problem to an international incident, in a short period of time. Indeed, an increasing number of food safety events have international ramifications and cannot only be managed at the national level,

but require closer linkages among food safety authorities internationally.

In order to efficiently prevent and control the cross-border spread of unsafe food, it is crucial that information is shared among countries in case of food safety emergencies.

WHAT IS INFOSAN?

INFOSAN is a global voluntary network of officially designated government authorities, responsible for, or involved in, the prevention, preparedness and/or response to food safety events/emergencies. INFOSAN is technically and strategically managed by FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) through a joint secretariat, with its main activities in the WHO Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses. The INFOSAN Secretariat's arm at FAO is located in the FAO Food Safety and Quality Unit, specifically in the Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES) – Food Safety programme. INFOSAN has an email account and a secure Community Website where members can exchange confidential information, directly contact the INFOSAN Secretariat, receive updates from the INFOSAN

Secretariat, and contribute to discussions on food safety issues of international significance.

PURPOSE OF INFOSAN

INFOSAN's mission is to strengthen countries' prevention, preparedness and response to food safety events and emergencies through fostering a global community of practice among food safety professionals. The Network promotes the rapid exchange of relevant information during food safety-related events; facilitates the sharing of information on important food safety-related issues of global interest; promotes partnerships and collaboration among countries and food safety related networks; and helps countries strengthen their capacities to manage food safety emergencies.

KEY FACTS

INFOSAN

INFOSAN – THE INTERNATIONAL FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITIES NETWORK - IS A GLOBAL NETWORK JOINTLY MANAGED BY FAO AND WHO

INFOSAN FACILITATES THE RAPID EXCHANGE OF RELEVANT INFORMATION DURING FOOD SAFETY EVENTS AND EMERGENCIES

INFOSAN CONTRIBUTES TO STRENGTHENING COUNTRIES' PREVENTION, PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TO FOOD SAFETY EVENTS OR EMERGENCIES

INFOSAN IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE FAO EMERGENCY PREVENTION SYSTEM (EMPRES) FOOD SAFETY PROGRAMME

CURRENTLY, 188 COUNTRIES ARE MEMBERS OF INFOSAN

ONE EMERGENCY CONTACT POINT AND ONE OR SEVERAL FOCAL POINT(S) ARE APPOINTED IN EACH MEMBER COUNTRY TO COORDINATE THE INFOSAN ACTIVITIES FOR THE RESPECTIVE COUNTRY

FAO-WHO INFOSAN

E-MAIL

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infosan@who.int

WEBSITES

<http://www.fao.org/food/food-safety-quality/empres-food-safety/early-warning/en/>
http://www.who.int/foodsafety/areas_work/infosan/en/

INFOSAN COMMUNITY WEBSITE

(for members only)

<https://extranet.who.int/infosan/en/home>



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WHO ARE INFOSAN MEMBERS?

Currently, 500+ participants from 188 countries are members of INFOSAN. Each country designates one INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point and one or more INFOSAN Focal Point(s) in various sectors relevant to food safety. Membership is restricted to government authorities responsible for, or involved in the prevention, preparedness and/or response to food safety events/emergencies in their country.

The INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point responds to requests from the INFOSAN Secretariat in the verification and assessment of events and is encouraged to report urgent food safety events of potential international significance to the INFOSAN Secretariat in coordination with relevant national authorities including the International Health Regulations (IHR) national focal point. The INFOSAN Focal Point(s) provides technical support to the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point.

INFOSAN ACTIVITIES

INFOSAN's main activities are emergency related. The INFOSAN Secretariat monitors and obtains information about food safety events through a variety of sources. This information is assessed by FAO/WHO experts in order to verify the event and determine the potential impact. The information is also verified by the relevant INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point. INFOSAN also engages in communication activities, including the issuance of international alerts.

Other INFOSAN activities include the provision of relevant training, such as technical webinars and simulation exercises, the development of tools and guidance materials, and the dissemination of food safety information of global interest pertaining to new

developments or initiatives, as well as lessons learned and best practices.

PREVENTING FOOD SAFETY EMERGENCIES

FAO supports INFOSAN through the EMPRES-Food Safety programme. Capacity development of countries in emergency prevention and early warning are major components of EMPRES-Food Safety contributing directly to INFOSAN. EMPRES-food safety co-organizes and participates in simulation exercises and webinars on food safety emergencies preparedness and response, produces guidance documents and provides training in early warning and food safety risk communication, and engages in surveillance activities. For example, in April 2017, INFOSAN organized for several African countries an online simulation exercise to practice emergencies preparedness and response set ups for food-borne outbreaks using the case of *E.coli* O157 infections linked to internationally distributed fruit and nut snack mix.

Furthermore, EMPRES-Food Safety has been part of training sessions on food safety risk communication during emergencies and crises in Senegal and the Seychelles. Through a food safety project in Senegal, EMPRES-Food Safety supported strengthening the country's food safety early warning and preparedness and the development of a food safety emergency response plan in the country. Its results are to be shared with seven neighbouring countries in a final workshop in Dakar.

INFOSAN regularly organizes webinars on various relevant topics for its members. A recent INFOSAN webinar on the use of Whole Genome Sequencing in foodborne outbreaks investigations has been extended to FAO's Food Safety Technical Network illustrating the importance of knowledge sharing.

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