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# **WHO global strategy for food safety**

## **Report by the Director-General**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Food safety is a public health and socioeconomic priority. Foodborne diseases have a significant impact on public health. Unsafe food containing harmful levels of bacteria, viruses, parasites, chemical or physical substances makes people sick and causes acute or chronic illnesses – including more than 200 diseases<sup>1</sup> ranging from diarrhoea to cancers – and in some cases, leads to permanent disability or death. Every year, an estimated 600 million – almost 1 in 10 people in the world – fall ill after eating contaminated food, resulting in a global annual burden of 33 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and 420 000 deaths.<sup>2</sup> Low- and middle-income countries are the most affected, with an annual estimated cost of US\$ 110 billion in productivity losses and medical treatment costs due to the consumption of unsafe food.<sup>3</sup>

2. Taking into account past experiences, current trends, and future needs in food safety and public health, resolution WHA73.5 on strengthening efforts on food safety adopted by the Seventy-third World Health Assembly in 2020 urged Member States to remain committed at the highest political level to recognizing food safety as an essential element of public health; to developing food safety policies that take into consideration all stages of the supply chain, the best available scientific evidence and advice, as well as innovation; to providing adequate resources to improve national food safety systems; to taking coherent actions across all relevant sectors in order to promote food safety, while recognizing consumer interests; and to integrating food safety into national and regional policies on health, agriculture, trade, environment and development.

3. In turn, the Health Assembly requested the Director-General to update the WHO global strategy for food safety,<sup>4</sup> in coordination with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and in consultation with Member States and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), in order to address current and emerging challenges, incorporating new technologies and including

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<sup>1</sup> Key facts: food safety. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020 (<https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/food-safety>, accessed 5 November 2021).

<sup>2</sup> WHO estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases: foodborne disease burden epidemiology reference group 2007–2015. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2015 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/199350>, accessed 5 November 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Jaffee S, Henson S, Unnevehr L, Grace D, Cassou E. The safe food imperative: accelerating progress in low- and middle-income countries. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and The World Bank; 2019 (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/30568>, accessed 5 November 2021).

<sup>4</sup> WHO global strategy for food safety: safer food for better health. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2002 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/42559>, accessed 5 November 2021).

innovative strategies for strengthening national food safety systems, and to submit a report for consideration by the Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

4. In response, the WHO Secretariat initiated the update of the WHO global strategy for food safety. The updated strategy aims to serve as a blueprint and guidance for Member States in their efforts to strengthen their national food safety systems and promote regional and global cooperation. This updated strategy will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and will be reviewed in 2030 when the world reflects upon the progress made towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **PROCESS OF UPDATING THE WHO GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR FOOD SAFETY**

5. WHO established through an open call a new technical advisory group on food safety: safer food for better health. In total, 24 renowned food safety experts representing WHO's six regions were selected and appointed by the Director-General to provide technical advice on updating the strategy. The content of the updated strategy builds on previous global and regional food safety strategies, as well as the meeting outcomes of the two high-level international food safety conferences<sup>2</sup> convened in 2019. Two meetings of the technical advisory group were held virtually from 8 to 10 February and on 19, 22, and 23 April 2021, to discuss the overall structure and content of the revised strategy. Besides the food safety experts and WHO staff, focal points from FAO, OIE and the Secretariat of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme also attended and provided their input at these two meetings.

6. Regular consultations were held with the FAO and OIE focal points. At the 27th Session of the Committee on Agriculture, FAO was also requested to develop a new FAO food safety strategy that would "align and integrate FAO's work on food safety with its current organizational changes and provide broader support to food systems transformation, fostering integration of scientific, regulatory and capacity development food safety perspectives across FAO work as well as building synergy with WHO's new food safety strategy".<sup>3</sup> WHO and FAO have held fortnightly meetings since late September 2020 so as to share information on the update of the WHO global strategy for food safety and harmonize the strategic efforts of both organizations on food safety. The WHO and FAO strategies prioritize the strengthening of food control systems, using evidence (data and science) for decision-making, and promoting stakeholder engagement and partnerships. Both organizations are discussing the development of a joint implementation framework to be rolled out after the strategies are approved.

7. As of 13 May 2021, WHO launched a two-month public web-based consultation on the updated strategy to collect feedback from all interested stakeholders, including Member States and governmental institutions, United Nations entities and other intergovernmental organizations, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, private sector entities, and individuals working in public health and food safety. WHO also held informal briefings with intergovernmental agencies in June and organized two Member States briefings in July and October. A summary report of the public consultation was published on the WHO website and all comments received were considered in the revision of the

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution WHA73.5, paragraph 2(1).

<sup>2</sup> FAO and WHO. 2020. The future of food safety – Transforming knowledge into action for people, economies and the environment. Technical summary by FAO and WHO. Rome. (<https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8386en>, accessed 5 November 2021).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/nd744en/nd744en.pdf>, accessed 5 November 2021.

strategy. A summary of the comments received and the Secretariat responses was presented to Member States during a briefing on 8 October 2021.

8. Further to decision WHA65(9) (2012) in which the Health Assembly decided that regional committees be asked to comment and provide input on all global strategies, policies and legal instruments such as conventions, regulations and codes; and decision WHA73(15) (2020), which clarifies that comments and inputs on global strategies, policies and legal instruments such as conventions, regulations and codes, made in line with decision WHA65(9) on WHO reform, may be understood to include those provided by Member States in the context of technical meetings, informal consultations and other intergovernmental meetings in the regions, Member States were invited to comment and provide input on the draft WHO global strategy for food safety, 2022–2030.

## **THE UPDATED WHO GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR FOOD SAFETY**

9. The full text of the WHO global strategy for food safety is available on the WHO website.<sup>1</sup> This document summarizes its vision, aim and strategic priorities and illustrates the plans for implementation and monitoring.

### **Vision and aim**

10. The vision of the updated strategy is to ensure that all people, everywhere, consume safe and healthy food so as to reduce the burden of foodborne diseases. The aim of the updated strategy is to guide and support Member States in their efforts to prioritize, plan, implement, monitor and regularly evaluate actions towards reducing the burden of foodborne diseases by continuously strengthening food safety systems and promoting global cooperation.

### **Five strategic priorities to accelerate global efforts in food safety**

11. The draft strategy identified five interlinked and mutually reinforcing strategic priorities with respective strategic objectives. Using the identified five strategic priorities and respective strategic objectives, the strategy aims to build forward-looking, evidence-based, people-centred, and cost-effective food safety systems with coordinated governance and adequate infrastructures.

#### **Strategic priority 1: Strengthening national food control systems**

12. Strengthening national food safety systems begins with establishing or improving the resources, infrastructure and various components of those systems. For example, this can include regulatory infrastructure, enforcement, surveillance, inspection, laboratory capacity and capability, coordination mechanisms and emergency response. Under strategic priority 1, there are six strategic objectives in this regard.

- (i) Establish a modern, harmonized and evidence-based framework of food legislation.
- (ii) Establish an institutional framework to coordinate the work of different competent authorities that manage national food control systems.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/draft-who-global-strategy-for-food-safety-2022-2030> (accessed 6 December 2021).

- (iii) Develop and implement fit-for-purpose standards and guidelines.
- (iv) Strengthen compliance, verification and enforcement.
- (v) Strengthen food monitoring and surveillance programmes.
- (vi) Establish food safety incident and emergency response systems.

### **Strategic priority 2: Identifying and responding to food safety challenges resulting from global changes and food systems transformation**

13. The global changes and transformations that food systems are experiencing today and those that are predicted to occur in the future will have implications for food safety. Food safety systems should thus be adequately equipped to identify, evaluate and respond to existing and emerging issues, such as the growing threat of foodborne antimicrobial resistance. Food safety systems must be transformed from reactive to proactive systems and should adopt a One Health approach when addressing health risks emerging at the human-animal-ecosystems interface. Under strategic priority 2, there are two strategic objectives in this regard.

- (i) Identify and evaluate food safety impacts arising from global changes and food systems transformations and movement of food.
- (ii) Adapt risk management options to emerging foodborne risks brought about by transformation and changes in global food systems and movement of food.

### **Strategic priority 3: Improving the use of food chain information, scientific evidence and risk assessment in making risk management decisions**

14. Food safety risk management is based on science. The generation, collection, utilization, interpretation and sharing of data lay the foundation for building evidence-based food safety systems and strengthening international cooperation. Under strategic priority 3, there are four strategic objectives in this regard.

- (i) Promote the generation of scientific evidence and the use of risk assessment when establishing and reviewing food control measures.
- (ii) Gather comprehensive information along and beyond the food chain and utilize these data when making informed risk management decisions.
- (iii) Source food safety information and risk analysis experiences from beyond national borders to strengthen risk management decisions and technical capacity.
- (iv) Take consistent and transparent risk management decisions when establishing food control measures.

### **Strategic priority 4: Strengthening stakeholder engagement and risk communication**

15. Food safety is a shared responsibility that requires joint efforts to be made by all stakeholders of food safety systems. Successfully ensuring food safety from farm to fork requires a more inclusive

approach encompassing all players involved in food safety systems, including empowered consumers. Under strategic priority 4, there are five strategic objectives in this regard.

- (i) Establish platforms for consultation on the national food safety agenda.
- (ii) Assess the pertinence of using non-regulatory schemes for enhancing food safety across the food chain.
- (iii) Establish frameworks for sharing verification of compliance with food safety regulatory requirements.
- (iv) Facilitate communication, capacity-building and engagement with food business operators and foster a food safety culture.
- (v) Facilitate communication, education and engagement with consumers.

#### **Strategic priority 5: Promoting food safety as an essential component in domestic, regional and international food trade**

16. Food safety is a complex issue that is influenced by socioeconomic status. With the globalization of the food trade, foodborne pathogens and diseases can travel across borders and cause significant health and economic impacts. To ensure increased access to safe food in both domestic and international markets, food safety systems should be more cost-effective for both importing and exporting countries, while enhancing food safety in domestic markets. Under strategic priority 5, there are four strategic objectives in this regard.

- (i) Strengthen food control systems and capacity development in regulatory systems for the domestic market.
- (ii) Strengthen interaction between national agencies responsible for domestic food safety and those facilitating international fair trading practices.
- (iii) Ensure that national food safety systems are aligned with the standards of the Codex Alimentarius Commission to protect public health and facilitate trade.
- (iv) Strengthen engagements of national competent authorities with international agencies and networks that establish standards and guidelines for food.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UPDATED STRATEGY**

17. Implementation of the updated strategy would rely on the commitment and efforts of Member States, WHO and the whole international community. As food safety systems in Member States are at various stages of development, the choice of strategic priorities should be tailored to the respective country situation and Member States should modify, redesign or strengthen their national food safety systems as appropriate based upon the strategic priorities identified in the updated strategy.

18. Enhancing international cooperation is a key enabler for the implementation of the strategy. National governments need to engage with the global food safety community to the maximum extent possible to inform and assist in strengthening food safety systems. Such international cooperation includes both technical cooperation among countries and participation and engagement in food safety

programmes, initiatives and networks coordinated by international organizations such as WHO and FAO.

19. WHO will, together with other international partners, support Member States by providing global leadership and fostering policy dialogues among stakeholders; synthesizing evidence and generating normative guidance in food safety; enhancing technical cooperation and building stronger capacities for countries; and strengthening partnerships and fostering global collaboration. A joint implementation framework, considering the updated WHO global strategy for food safety and the new FAO food safety strategy, is under discussion with FAO.

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE UPDATED STRATEGY**

20. Underpinning the updated strategy will be an accountability framework to measure the rate of implementation. The updated strategy encourages Member States to select indicators and set targets at the national level to evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of national food safety systems in achieving the objectives to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade. A global mechanism will also be established to measure the progress of the strategy using a set of global indicators and targets. The updated version of the strategy contains three global indicators:

- diarrhoeal diseases due to contaminated food consumption;
- national foodborne disease surveillance in place for the detection and monitoring of foodborne disease and food contamination; and
- multisectoral collaboration mechanisms for food safety events.

21. The first two of these indicators are already monitored and measured regularly through the International Health Regulations (2005), and the third is evaluated on an ongoing basis by WHO's Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group.

22. Based on the existing data collected through WHO studies on the global burden estimates of foodborne diseases and the International Health Regulations (2005), the updated strategy also proposes three global targets for the aforementioned indicators. The proposed targets are attainable through the implementation of the strategy. By 2030, WHO is aiming to support countries to achieve:

- a 40% reduction of foodborne diarrhoeal disease incidence per 100 000 population;
- a score of 3.5 or above (with 5 being the full mark) in terms of the global average capacity score for national surveillance system of foodborne disease and food contamination under the joint external evaluation;<sup>1</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Joint external evaluation tool: International Health Regulations (2005), second edition. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO (<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259961/9789241550222-eng.pdf?sequence=1>, accessed 5 November 2021).

- a score 4 or 5 for multisectoral collaboration on food safety events under State Party self-assessment annual reporting.<sup>1</sup>

23. WHO will provide a framework to monitor implementation and to validate the progress made towards these global targets.

### **ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

24. The Executive Board is invited to note the report and to consider the following draft decision.

The Executive Board, having considered the report on the WHO global strategy for food safety,<sup>2</sup> decided to recommend to the Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly the adoption of the following decision:

The Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly, having considered the report on the WHO global strategy for food safety,

Decided:

- (1) to adopt the updated WHO global strategy for food safety;
- (2) to call on Member States to develop country implementation road maps and to make appropriate financial resources available to support such work; and
- (3) to request the Director-General to report back on progress in the implementation of the WHO global strategy for food safety to the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly in 2024 and thereafter every two years until 2030.

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<sup>1</sup> International Health Regulations (2005) State Party Self-Assessment Annual Reporting Tool. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/272432>, accessed 5 November 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Document EB150/25.