

PHOTOCOPY
OF PERSERVATION

Food Safety

LISTERIA DISEASE

The Oval Office

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Warm weather has finally taken hold in most of the country, and millions of families are now taking weekend picnics and hosting backyard barbecues. Today, I want to speak with you about the foods we serve at these gatherings, and how we can make them even safer than they already are.

Our food supply is the most bountiful in the world. And for seven years, now, our administration has been committed to making it the safest in the world. We've improved dramatically the nation's inspection system for meat, poultry and seafood. We've added new safeguards to protect families from unsafe imported foods. We've established a sophisticated early warning system that uses DNA fingerprinting techniques to detect and prevent outbreaks of food-borne illness. From farm to table, we've made great strides to ensure the safety of our food supply.

But outbreaks of food-related illnesses are still far too prevalent. In fact, millions of Americans get sick from eating contaminated food each year.

One threat we must address immediately comes from a food-borne pathogen called Listeria, which has been the cause of recent recalls of hot dogs and luncheon meats, and several deadly outbreaks of disease. The most famous case emerged a year and a half ago, when Listeria killed 21 people and sickened 100 others, all of whom had eaten contaminated meat from a single plant. It was the nation's most deadly food safety epidemic in 15 years.

Fortunately, Listeria is less common than salmonella, E. coli, and other food-borne bacteria. But unfortunately, it is far more dangerous. A staggering 20 percent of Listeria infections result in death. As with other food-borne bacteria, it's rarely healthy adults who come down with Listeria infections. Instead, it's the most vulnerable among us: infants, the elderly, pregnant women, and those whose immune systems have been weakened by chemotherapy or AIDS.

While our administration has already taken a number of important steps to reduce the threat of Listeria, it's clear we must do more to protect Americans from this deadly pathogen. So today, I'm directing the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services to prepare an aggressive new strategy to significantly reduce the risk of illness from Listeria. As part of this strategy, we will propose new regulations to require scientific approaches, such as systematic testing for Listeria at food-processing plants -- not just random checks. This and other measures will allow us to cut in half the number of Listeria-related illnesses over the next five years, and save well over 1,000 lives.

Today, I call on the food industry to work with us as we develop our new Listeria strategy. And I call on Congress to help us strengthen food safety across the board. Just this week, unfortunately, the Congress took a major step backward by refusing to fully fund our food safety initiative. In fact, they've now voted to block funding for our new efforts to protect millions of American families from the dangers of salmonella poisoning in eggs. We should be doing more, not less, to ensure the safety of our food.

If we work together, we can make real gains this year. We can increase the number of inspections of domestic and imported foods. We can expand the FDA's authority to turn away imported food that does not meet our high safety standards. And at long last, we can give the Department of Agriculture the authority to recall bad food, and impose civil penalties for repeat violations. After all, the Department has the right to penalize a circus to protect animals from harm; it's about time we gave them the tools they need to protect human beings from harm, too.

Ensuring the safety of our food and the health of our people are among the most important parts of our citizens' basic contract with their government. For the sake of millions of Americans, especially the most vulnerable among us, it's an obligation we simply must work together to uphold.

Thanks for listening.

END

Message Sent To:

Q&A
FOOD SAFETY RADIO ADDRESS
May 6, 2000

Q: What did the President announce today?

A: Today the President announced an aggressive new strategy to combat foodborne illness caused by *Listeria monocytogenes*. The President directed the Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) to report back to him within 120 days on aggressive steps they will take to significantly reduce the risk of illness and death from *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods. In particular, the President directed USDA to complete proposed regulations that include any appropriate microbiological testing and other measures by industry to: 1) prevent cross-contamination in the processing environment; 2) ensure that the processing of ready-to-eat products meets appropriate standards; and 3) ensure that such products are safe throughout their shelf life. In addition, the President directed HHS to develop an action plan identifying additional steps necessary to reduce *Listeria monocytogenes* contamination. This plan should include consideration of the identification of control measures for at-risk foods and the publication of guidance to processors, retailers, and food service facilities. Finally, both USDA and HHS will consider whether enhanced labeling is necessary to provide additional safeguards for consumers. These actions, taken together, should allow the Administration to reach its Healthy People 2010 goal of reducing by half the number of illnesses caused by *Listeria* from 0.5 to 0.25 cases per 100,000 persons by 2005 –five years early.

Q: How dangerous is *Listeria monocytogenes*?

A: *Listeria monocytogenes* can cause a severe infection called listeriosis. Listeriosis is a significant public health concern, and is especially lethal, resulting in death in about 20 percent of the cases. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 2518 persons become ill and 504 persons die each year from listeriosis. Pregnant women with listeriosis can pass the infection on to their fetuses, potentially resulting in severe illness or death in the fetus or newborn infant. Others at high risk for severe disease or death are the elderly and those with weakened immune systems. Ready-to-eat food products, such as lunch meats, smoked fish, certain types of soft cheeses, and hot dogs, are among the foods most commonly associated with food-related illness from *Listeria*.

Q: How does this announcement fit with USDA's action plan on *Listeria* and the joint USDA/HHS *Listeria* risk assessment?

A: This announcement complements and builds upon USDA's accomplishments and strengthens the planned actions to reduce the threat posed by this deadly pathogen. The joint USDA-HHS *Listeria* risk assessment, which is scheduled to be completed this summer, will estimate the level of consumer exposure to *Listeria monocytogenes* and will determine particular foods of concern based on their contribution to overall deaths and serious illness caused by foodborne *Listeria*. The results of this risk assessment will

form a scientific basis for any proposed regulations and other actions that USDA and HHS will take to combat illnesses caused by *Listeria*.

Q: Did the President make this announcement because of the Bil Mar outbreak last year?

A: The Bil Mar outbreak focused the nation's attention on the need to take further steps to ensure the health of the American public by combating *Listeria monocytogenes* in all kinds of ready-to-eat products. That outbreak, other illnesses caused by *Listeria*, and the large number of recalls throughout the nation due to products adulterated with *Listeria*, contributed to the President's decision to take action.

Q: How many people were stricken by that outbreak and what caused it?

A: There were 101 illnesses and 21 deaths (15 adult and 6 miscarriages or stillbirths) in that outbreak. The illnesses were linked to hot dogs and luncheon meats processed by Bil Mar Foods, a Zeeland, Michigan, processing plant.

Q: What is listeriosis?

A: Listeriosis is a serious and potentially fatal infection caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. The disease affects primarily pregnant women, newborns, and adults with weakened immune systems. There have been few documented cases of healthy people contracting listeriosis. A person with listeriosis has fever, muscle aches, and sometimes gastrointestinal symptoms, such as nausea or diarrhea. If infection spreads to the nervous system, symptoms such as headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions can occur. Infected pregnant women may experience only a mild, flu-like illness; however, infections during pregnancy can lead to premature delivery, infection of the newborn, or even stillbirth.

Q: Why hasn't USDA already required testing, shelf life studies, or labeling?

A: Following the listeriosis outbreak in 1998-99, USDA required manufacturers of ready-to-eat products to reassess their science-based preventive food safety plans to determine if *Listeria* is adequately addressed; issued guidance materials addressing environmental and product testing; continued its testing of approximately 3,500 product samples per year; initiated a consumer education campaign; and began plans for research on this difficult pathogen. Based on the industry's response to USDA's guidance on testing, the Administration determined that it should take the next steps and build upon those efforts already underway.

Q: What exactly will USDA propose in its regulations?

A: USDA will propose any appropriate microbiological testing, measures by industry to prevent cross contamination in processing plants, standards for the processing of ready-to-eat meat and poultry products, and documentation on the continued safety of meat and poultry products throughout their shelf life. USDA will hold a public meeting on May 15th and meet with the National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry

Inspection on May 16 and 17, where its response to the President's announcement and other future actions will be discussed.

Q: Can you give me information about the *Listeria* public meeting?

A: The meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 15, at 9 a.m. at the Holiday Inn, 415 New Jersey Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. The meeting will address USDA's plans to further protect the public from foodborne illnesses associated with *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Q: Is *Listeria monocytogenes* a problem only in meat and poultry products?

A: No. USDA and HHS are working on a risk assessment of products that cause listeriosis, including ready-to-eat seafood products and cheeses in addition to meat and poultry products.

Q: How can consumers reduce their risk of contracting listeriosis?

A: Consumers can reduce risks from all foodborne illnesses by cleaning hands and surfaces with hot, soapy water; separating ready-to-eat foods from raw foods to avoid cross-contamination; cooking to safe temperatures; and promptly chilling perishables. People at risk for listeriosis should reheat ready-to-eat foods to steaming; wash hands and surfaces after handling ready-to-eat products; avoid soft cheeses and unpasteurized milk (or cheeses made from unpasteurized milk); and observe all expiration dates.

Budget

Q: What did the President request in his FY2001 budget for food safety?

A: A total of \$422 million is included in the President's budget for his food safety initiative - a \$68 million, or 19 percent, increase over FY 2000 enacted. The initiative includes an additional \$40 million for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to achieve annual inspections of high-risk domestic foods such as unpasteurized juice; expand the number of inspections of imported foods; enhance the national network of public health laboratories capable of subtyping foodborne pathogen DNA for rapid response to disease outbreaks (PulseNet); and expand research, risk assessment and education activities. The Department of Agriculture's (USDA) \$28 million increase would extend risk assessment modeling and data collection to include the pre-harvest phase for all foods and support bioscience research to develop effective methods of handling and treating agricultural products to minimize microbial contamination. Funding is also proposed for HHS and USDA to begin implementation of the Egg Safety Action Plan adopted by the President's Council on Food Safety.

Q: What action did Congress take on President's food safety budget request?

A: Just this week, unfortunately, the Congress took a major step backward by refusing to fully fund the President's food safety initiative. In fact, Congress voted to block funding for our new efforts to protect millions of American families from the dangers of salmonella poisoning in eggs. The President's Egg Safety Action Plan aims to cut in half

by 2005 the number of Salmonella Enteritidis (SE) illnesses attributed to eggs, and will set a goal of eliminating such illnesses altogether by 2010. Nearly 3.3 million eggs in the U.S. are infected with the SE bacteria annually, and in 1997 alone, there were an estimated 300,000 cases of SE infections. The estimated costs of these illnesses are as high as \$870 million each year.

Legislative Proposals

Q: What did the President say in his radio address about the FDA import legislation?

A: The President called on Congress to pass food safety legislation, introduced by Senators Milkulski, Kennedy and Durbin, and Rep. Eshoo, that gives the FDA greater authority over imported foods. This legislation will ensure that imports of fruits, vegetables, and other food products meet U.S. food safety requirements or provide the same level of protection as is required for U.S. products. The legislation also will authorize FDA to bar, under certain circumstances, imports of foods associated with outbreaks of foodborne illness.

Q: How is this different from current authority?

A: This legislation increases the FDA's authority to refuse imports for foods. Currently, the FDA can only refuse imports after inspection or testing at the border when the FDA determines that the food appears to be unsafe or otherwise violates U.S. law. This new legislation will ensure that food products entering this country were grown and processed in conditions that meet U.S. food safety requirements or otherwise achieve the level of protection required for U.S. produced food, and will create an incentive for exporting countries to make systemic changes in their food safety systems. This authority is necessary because experience has shown that inspection and testing of products at the border may not be sufficient in all cases to ensure the safety of food products. It may be necessary to identify and address the source of potential contamination to ensure that products offered for sale in the United States meet domestic food safety requirements or otherwise achieve the level of protection required. FDA currently has such authority with respect to domestic production.

Q: What did the President say in his radio address about the USDA mandatory recall/civil penalties legislation?

A: The President called on Congress to pass the Food Safety Enforcement Enhancement Act, sponsored by Senators Harkin, which gives USDA the ability to assess civil fines and to order mandatory recalls of unsafe meat and poultry products. Currently, the USDA can respond to food safety violations only by bringing criminal actions or withdrawing inspections; all recalls are done on a voluntary basis and no civil penalties are available. This new legislation will give USDA additional enforcement tools to prevent consumers from ingesting and becoming ill from dangerous meat and poultry.

Draft 5/4/00

May 6, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE
THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

SUBJECT: REDUCING THE RISK OF *LISTERIA MONOCYTOGENES*

Food safety is a vital issue for all Americans. When people across this country sit down to a meal at home or in a restaurant, they expect that the food they eat will be safe. While the U.S. food supply is abundant, the marketplace has evolved from one with a predominance of minimally processed basic commodities for home preparation to one with an array of highly processed products that are ready-to-eat or require minimal preparation in the home.

In order to take account of the changes in the way Americans eat and to ensure that America's food supply remains safe, my Administration has made wide-ranging, dramatic improvements in food safety. We have worked to successfully revolutionize our meat and poultry inspection system, instituting scientific testing and pathogen reduction controls to target and reduce dangerous pathogens like *Salmonella* and *E. coli* O157:H7 and the illnesses they cause. We also have implemented an innovative system of preventative controls for the seafood industry, published industry guidance to improve the safety of fruits and vegetables, and taken steps to prevent unsafe imported foods from reaching American consumers. My Food Safety Initiative is now in its third year of improving food safety surveillance, outbreak response, education, research, and inspection. In 1998, I issued an executive order to create the President's Council on Food Safety, which is overseeing federal food safety research efforts and is currently developing a comprehensive, national food safety strategic plan. It is under my Council's auspices that the Administration produced last year an Egg Safety Action Plan with the goal of eliminating illnesses from *Salmonella* Enteritidis in eggs. Additionally, we launched a high-tech early warning system called PulseNet that uses DNA-fingerprinting techniques to help us better detect and prevent outbreaks of foodborne illness.

These and other efforts have helped to make meaningful improvements in food safety. But we can do even more. Millions of Americans get sick from eating contaminated food each year. With changing patterns of food production and consumption, we must continue to aggressively meet the food safety challenges of the 21st century.

One challenge we must address immediately is that of *Listeria monocytogenes*, which can cause a severe infection called listeriosis. Listeriosis is a significant public health concern, and is especially lethal, resulting in death in about 20 percent of the cases. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 2518 persons become ill and 504 persons die each year from listeriosis. Pregnant women with listeriosis can pass the infection on to their fetuses, potentially resulting in severe illness or death in the fetus or newborn infant. Others at high risk

for severe disease or death are the elderly and those with weakened immune systems. Ready-to-eat food products, such as lunch meats, smoked fish, certain types of soft cheeses, and hot dogs, are among the foods most commonly associated with food-related illness from *Listeria*. In order to address this serious public health problem, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture (USDA), is conducting a risk assessment on *Listeria monocytogenes* to determine which foods warrant further preventive measures. This risk assessment will be completed shortly, and I believe we must build on what is already being done to target this deadly organism.

My Administration's goal – articulated in our Healthy People 2010 plan – is to reduce by half the number of illnesses caused by *Listeria* by 2010 from 0.5 cases to 0.25 cases per 100,000. In order to meet and to exceed this goal, I hereby direct the USDA and HHS, in cooperation and consultation with my Food Safety Council and relevant federal agencies, to report back to me within 120 days on the aggressive steps you will take to significantly reduce the risk of illness and death by *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods. In particular, within this time period, I direct USDA to complete proposed regulations that include any appropriate microbiological testing and other measures by industry to: 1) prevent cross-contamination in the processing environment; 2) ensure that the processing of ready-to-eat products meet appropriate standards; and 3) ensure that such products are safe throughout their shelf life. In addition, I direct HHS, within this time frame, to develop an action plan identifying additional steps necessary to reduce *Listeria monocytogenes* contamination. This plan should include consideration of the identification of control measures for at-risk foods and the publication of guidance to processors, retailers, and food service facilities. Finally, both USDA and HHS should consider whether enhanced labeling is necessary to provide additional safeguards for consumers. These actions should be based in science and lay the foundation for a comprehensive approach that significantly reduces the opportunity for *Listeria* product contamination and *Listeria*-related illnesses to occur. All these actions, taken together, should allow us to achieve our Healthy People Goal by 2005 rather than 2010.

These steps will continue to ensure the safety of America's food supply, and will help protect some of the Nation's most vulnerable populations from foodborne illness.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

**PRESIDENT CLINTON ANNOUNCES AGGRESSIVE
NEW STRATEGY TO COMBAT LISTERIA IN HOT DOGS AND
OTHER READY-TO-EAT FOODS**

May 6, 2000

Today, in his radio address, the President will announce an aggressive new strategy to significantly reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses caused by *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods such as hot dogs, smoked fish, certain types of soft cheeses, and lunch meats. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 2518 persons become ill and 504 persons die each year from *Listeria* – resulting in death in about 20 percent of cases. Although foodborne listeriosis occurs less frequently than illnesses caused by other foodborne pathogens, it has one of the highest fatality rates, particularly for newborns, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems. As the summer months approach with increased picnics and barbecues, the President will direct the Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Service (HHS) to take action, including proposing regulations, to significantly reduce the risk of illness and death from *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods. USDA will hold a public meeting on May 15 in Washington, D.C., to discuss these actions and to follow up on its 1999 action plan on *Listeria*.

TAKING ACTION TO REDUCE ILLNESSES FROM READY-TO-EAT FOODS. Today the President will announce an aggressive new strategy to combat foodborne illness caused by *Listeria*. The President will direct the USDA and HHS to report back to him within 120 days on the aggressive steps they will take to significantly reduce the risk of illness and death from *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods. In particular, the President will direct USDA to complete proposed regulations that include any appropriate microbiological testing and other measures by industry to: 1) prevent cross-contamination in the processing environment; 2) ensure that the processing of ready-to-eat products meets appropriate standards; and 3) ensure that such products are safe throughout their shelf life. In addition, the President will direct HHS to develop an action plan identifying additional steps necessary to reduce *Listeria monocytogenes* contamination. This plan should include consideration of the identification of control measures for at-risk foods and the publication of guidance to processors, retailers, and food service facilities. Finally, both USDA and HHS will consider whether enhanced labeling is necessary to provide additional safeguards for consumers. These actions, taken together, should allow the Administration to reach its Healthy People 2010 goal of reducing by half the number of illnesses caused by *Listeria* from 0.5 to 0.25 cases per 100,000 persons by 2005 –five years early.

BUILDING ON A STRONG RECORD OF ENSURING FOOD SAFETY. The Clinton Administration has made food safety a high priority by seeking substantial funding for such initiatives as a nationwide early-warning system for foodborne illness, increased inspections, and the expansion of food-safety research, risk assessment and education. The Administration has put into place improved science-based standards for meat, poultry, and seafood products. The President has also created a Food Safety Council, which is now developing a comprehensive plan to ensure the safety of the nation's food supply into the 21st century.

CLINTON/GORE ADMINISTRATION: A RECORD OF IMPROVING FOOD SAFETY

The Clinton/Gore Administration has made reducing foodborne illness a national priority, to ensure that our food supply remains among the safest in the world. The Administration has put in place improved safety standards for meat, poultry, and seafood products, and developed enhanced standards for fruit and vegetable juices. Research, education, and surveillance efforts have also been greatly expanded. Significant milestones in the Administration's efforts:

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| December 1999 | Announced Egg Safety Action Plan that will cut in half by 2005 the number of <i>Salmonella</i> Enteritidis (SE) illnesses attributed to eggs, and will set a goal of eliminating such illnesses altogether by 2010. |
| July 1999 | Announced efforts to improve egg safety by requiring that shell eggs be stored at 45 degrees Fahrenheit or below during transport, in warehouses, and at retail stores - and by requiring safe handling statements on egg cartons. |
| July 1999 | Directed the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Treasury Department to explore additional actions they could take to protect consumers from unsafe imported foods. |
| Jan. 1999 | Implemented new science-based inspection system called Hazard Analysis-Critical Control Points (HACCP) in almost 3,000 small meat and poultry plants. |
| Oct. 1998 | Published guidance for growers, packers, and shippers of fresh fruits and vegetables to provide information on agricultural and management practices to enhance the safety of fresh produce. |
| Aug. 1998 | Created the President's Food Safety Council, which is charged with developing a comprehensive strategic plan for Federal food safety activities and ensuring that all Federal agencies involved in food safety work together to develop coordinated food safety budgets each year. |
| July 1998 | Announced Joint Institute for Food Safety Research, which will develop a strategic plan for conducting and coordinating all federal food safety research activities, including with the private sector and academia. |
| | Announced new warning labels that would be required on packaged fresh fruit and vegetable juices that have not been processed to prevent, reduce, or eliminate illness-causing microbes. |
| May 1998 | Formed national computer network of public health laboratories, called "PulseNet," to help rapidly identify and stop outbreaks of foodborne illness. The new system enables epidemiologists to respond up to five times faster than before in identifying serious and widespread food contamination problems by performing DNA "fingerprinting" on foodborne pathogens. |

- Feb. 1998 Announced proposed food safety budget, which requests approximately \$101 million increase for food safety initiatives.
- Jan. 1998 Implemented new, science-based HACCP system for 300 largest meat and poultry plants.
- Dec. 1997 Approved irradiation of meat products for controlling disease-causing microorganisms. Implemented seafood HACCP regulations for all seafood processors.
- Oct. 1997 Directed additional actions to improve the safety of domestic and imported fruit and vegetables.
- Established Partnership for Food Safety Education, an ambitious federal-private partnership to reduce foodborne illness by educating Americans about safe food handling practices. The Partnership has launched a multi-year, broad-based public education campaign—Fight BAC!—to teach Americans about safe food-handling practices.
- May 1997 Announced comprehensive new initiative to improve the safety of nation's food supply—"Food Safety from Farm to Table"--detailing a \$43 million food safety program, including measures to improve surveillance, outbreak response, education, and research.
- Jan. 1997 Unveiled National Food Safety Initiative, a five-point plan working with consumers, producers, industry, states, universities, and the public to strengthen and improve food safety.
- Announced new early warning system, the Foodborne Outbreak Response Coordinating Group (FORC-G), a partnership of federal and state agencies, to develop a comprehensive, coordinated national foodborne illness outbreak response system to increase coordination and communication among federal, state, and local agencies; guide efficient use of resources and expertise during an outbreak; and prepare for new and emerging threats to the U.S. food supply.
- Aug. 1996 President Clinton signed Safe Drinking Water Act of 1996, which requires drinking water systems to protect against dangerous contaminants such as *Cryptosporidium* and gives people the right to know about contaminants in their tap water.
- President Clinton signed Food Quality Protection Act of 1996, which streamlines regulation of pesticides by FDA and EPA and puts important new public-health protections in place, especially for children.
- July 1996 Announced new HACCP regulations that modernize the nation's meat and poultry inspection system for the first time in 90 years. New standards help prevent *E. coli* bacteria contamination in meat.

- Jan. 1996 The Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet), a collaborative effort among HHS and USDA, along with state health departments and local investigators around the country, begins collecting data to better track the incidence of foodborne illness and monitor the effectiveness of food safety programs in reducing foodborne illness.
- Dec. 1995 Issued new rules to ensure seafood safety, using HACCP regulatory programs to require food industries to design and implement preventive measures and increase the industries' responsibility for and control of their safety assurance actions.
- 1994 Embarked on CDC strategic program to detect, prevent, and control emerging infectious disease threats, some of which are foodborne, making significant progress toward this goal in each successive year.
- Reorganized USDA to establish Office of the Under Secretary for Food Safety. This increases the visibility of food safety within USDA and separates food safety functions from marketing functions carried out by other parts of USDA. Reorganization also creates a new Office of Public Health and Science within FSIS to improve the scientific base needed to make sound regulatory decisions, based on public health.
- 1993 Vice-President Gore's National Performance Review issued a report recommending that government and industry move toward a system of preventive controls for food safety.