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Gov. Beshear: Kentucky Launches New Food Safety Reporting Website

The site aims to increase public protection, consumer convenience for reporting illness

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Oct. 13, 2022) – Today, in keeping with his priorities to improve public health and safety in the commonwealth, Gov. Andy Beshear announced the launch of a new website – FoodSafetyReporting.ky.gov – where Kentuckians can easily report foodborne issues.

Until now, when someone suspected foodborne illness, it was reported to district or local health departments via phone, then a decision was made as to whether further investigation was needed. The new website allows for quick and easy reporting by consumers. The website also allows state public health officials to get the necessary information more efficiently, and in return, allows for quicker action to prevent others from becoming sick.

“Protecting the health and safety of our Kentucky families is my top priority,” Gov. Beshear said. “With this new service, we will improve our ability to quickly help Kentuckians receive, analyze and respond to foodborne illness reports and identify foodborne outbreaks and prevent others from getting sick.”

Since the previous in-take process for food complaints was solely handled at the local level, quantifying statewide information can become very complex. The new food safety reporting website provides the state’s first-ever centralized system for foodborne illness data collection. Local health departments base the need for an investigation on how many people are sick, what their symptoms include, when the illness began and how long it lasted, whether people are still becoming sick, what people ate and, potentially, how many people were exposed. If necessary, the germ that caused people to become sick is identified through laboratory testing at the health department or clinical provider’s office. The health department will visit a food establishment or store suspected to be tied with the food that caused the illness, if needed.

“The goal with this new food safety reporting site is to quickly get information from consumers, which will help to prevent others from becoming sick,” said Eric Friedlander, secretary of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

How to Report

Consumers may still report food safety concerns by phone to their local health department, according to Department for Public Health (DPH) Commissioner Dr. Steven Stack. The site offers an [online form](#) for gathering location data and the suspected source of illness, in addition to serving as a source of information related to foodborne illness.

When the online form is submitted, the platform sends an alert to DPH's Food Safety Branch and the appropriate local health department for follow-up. If needed, a multiagency response team can be activated to minimize impact.

"We want to avoid situations where rapid response is needed, but should that be the case, DPH, including the state lab and local health departments, stand ready to respond with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services," Dr. Stack said.

An awareness campaign will launch Oct. 14, funded through a grant from the Food Protection Task Force and a special projects grant. The three-month campaign targets all 120 Kentucky counties with a focus on digital communication – social media, search engine optimization and display ads – to elevate awareness.

Symptoms

Foodborne illness is a preventable public health challenge, according to Dr. Stack. It comes from eating contaminated food. Onset of symptoms may occur within minutes to weeks and often presents itself as flu-like, as the ill person may experience symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or fever. Because the symptoms resemble the flu, many people may not recognize that the illness is caused by harmful bacteria or other pathogens in food.

"Everyone is at risk for getting a foodborne illness," Dr. Stack said, adding that some people are at greater risk for experiencing a more serious illness or even death should they get a foodborne illness. Those at greater risk are infants, young children, pregnant women and their unborn babies, older adults and people with weakened immune systems, including HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes, kidney disease and transplant patients.

DPH's Food Safety Branch helps make sure food products are safe in restaurants, grocery stores, nursing homes, schools, food processing plants, food/beverage vending machines, hotels, fairs, festivals and other locations where food is offered to the public. The branch also provides assistance and guidance to health departments carrying out state laws and regulations at the local level.

Prevention

Consumers' best defense against contracting foodborne illness includes frequent and thorough handwashing, especially before touching food; familiarity with food safety inspections; and, if attending an event such as a picnic or potluck, remaining attentive to how long certain foods like beef, fish, pork, poultry, eggs and dairy have been away from a source of heat or refrigeration. Germs from raw meat should be kept from contaminating fruits, vegetables and other foods and meat. Chicken, fish and eggs should be fully cooked.

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Information on how the state is working to improve the lives and health of our people is available at CHFS.ky.gov. Follow the cabinet on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).