



## Safe Food for a Healthy Life

An Initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts at Georgetown University

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**MEDIA CONTACT:** Stephen Kay (301-908-0095)

### **SALMONELLA SAINTPAUL OUTBREAK EXPOSES FOOD SAFETY WEAKNESSES**

*Produce Safety Project Report Makes Recommendations for System in Critical Need of Reform*

**WASHINGTON, DC** – Weaknesses in food safety policy, organization and communications were all displayed during this summer’s outbreak of *Salmonella* Saintpaul, according to a report released today by the Produce Safety Project (PSP), an initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts at Georgetown University.

The report, “Breakdown: Lessons to Be Learned from the 2008 *Salmonella* Saintpaul Outbreak,” represents an in-depth review of the public record of last summer’s *Salmonella* Saintpaul outbreak that caused illnesses in more than 1,400 people across the country.

Congressional leaders and produce industry representatives have called for public health officials to conduct an analysis of the public health system’s response to the outbreak. The report is an effort to frame questions that such a review should consider. In particular, the report focuses on: food safety policy; the public health system’s organization, capacity and effectiveness in the outbreak response; and risk communications with the media and the public.

Highlights and recommendations from the report include:

- The need for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to use its existing statutory authorities to establish mandatory and enforceable safety standards for fresh produce. While FDA officials said the outbreak showed the need for these standards, they said Congress needs to pass legislation to grant it explicit authority to do so. However, the report notes that FDA has already used existing authorities to put in place preventive safety standards for seafood in 1995 and for juice in 2001.
- The need for organizational reforms throughout the public health system for a more coordinated outbreak response. The report raises questions about how timely and effectively data was shared between public health agencies and if it contributed to a

[www.ProduceSafetyProject.org](http://www.ProduceSafetyProject.org)

3300 Whitehaven Street, NW Suite 5000 | Box 571444 | Washington, DC 20057  
(202) 687-2937 phone | (202) 687-2939 fax



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delayed identification of jalapeno and serrano peppers as a vehicle for *Salmonella* Saintpaul.

- The need to have established and unified risk communication plans in place before an outbreak. The report documents “dueling” public health messages from various agencies announcing the outbreak, and questions why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention changed its presentation of data numerous times in the middle of the outbreak.

“Many of these problems have been identified for years by expert body after expert body,” said Jim O’Hara, director of PSP. “If we pass up this opportunity to learn from this most recent outbreak, we will keep repeating the same costly mistakes –for public health and industry alike.”

For the report and comprehensive timeline, PSP reviewed all of the public statements and Web site postings of the CDC and FDA; the transcripts of the FDA/CDC media calls; press releases and Web site postings by state public- health departments and industry trade associations; and media coverage from around the country. In addition, PSP staff attended and monitored the oversight hearings held by Congressional committees.

“The Obama Administration should make the establishment of mandatory, enforceable safety standards for fresh produce a food safety priority and take steps to fix our broken outbreak response system,” O’Hara said. “Both actions will go a long way toward safeguarding public health and protecting farmers.”

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*The Produce Safety Project at Georgetown University seeks the establishment by the Food and Drug Administration of mandatory and enforceable safety standards for domestic and imported fresh produce, from farm to fork. Our families need to have confidence that federal food safety regulation is based on prevention, scientifically sound risk assessment and management, and coordinated integrated data collection. For more information online, visit [www.producesafetyproject.org](http://www.producesafetyproject.org)*

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