

▶ DIRECT FROM CDC ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



Elaine Curtiss,  
MEd



Pamela S.  
Wigington

# Use Resources From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to Strengthen Environmental Health Programs

**Editor’s Note:** The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) strives to provide up-to-date and relevant information on environmental health and to build partnerships in the profession. In pursuit of these goals, NEHA features this column on environmental health services from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in every issue of the *Journal*.

In these columns, authors from CDC’s Water, Food, and Environmental Health Services Branch, as well as guest authors, will share insights and information about environmental health programs, trends, issues, and resources. The conclusions in these columns are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of CDC.

Elaine Curtiss and Pamela Wigington work on communications in CDC’s Water, Food, and Environmental Health Services Branch.

**S**trong environmental health programs understand the public health needs of their communities and meet those needs with effective solutions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Water, Food, and Environmental Health Services Branch provides a variety of resources to help your program, such as:

- preventing environmental causes of foodborne illnesses and outbreaks,
- addressing threats to health from recreational water and drinking water, and
- using data to address environmental hazards and improve services.

## Preventing Environmental Causes of Foodborne Illnesses and Outbreaks

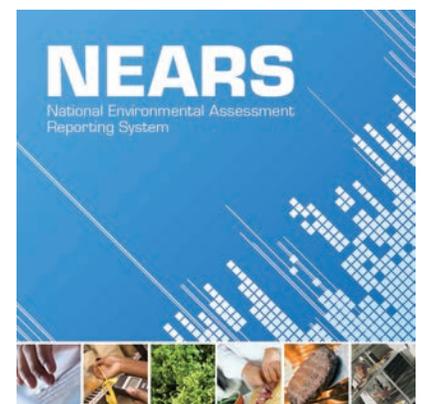
More than one half of all foodborne outbreaks in the U.S. are associated with restaurants,

delis, banquet facilities, schools, and other institutions (Dewey-Mattia, Manikonda, Hall, Wise, & Crowe, 2018). Furthermore, environmental factors are responsible for many of the foodborne illnesses in the U.S. every year, particularly in restaurants. CDC supports state and local environmental health programs to identify environmental factors that contribute to foodborne illness outbreaks.

Studies from CDC’s Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net) found that bare hand contact by a food worker is a contributing factor in about 1 of 4 restaurant-related outbreaks (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019; Lipcsei et al., 2019). EHS-Net studies show that restaurants with certified managers were less likely to be linked with outbreaks, were more likely to comply with Food and Drug Administration *Food Code* regulations, and had better

FIGURE 1

### National Environmental Assessment Reporting System (NEARS)



Address environmental causes of foodborne illnesses with NEARS and more resources at [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/activities/food.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/activities/food.html).

food safety practices (Hoover et al., 2020). Explore more of EHS-Net’s food safety study findings and evidence-based recommendations for improving food safety and reducing foodborne outbreak risk, including new summaries on:

- key takeaways from four studies on food workers and hand washing and
- how retail delis can address food safety gaps.

CDC’s National Environmental Assessment Reporting System (NEARS) (Figure 1) captures environmental assessment data from foodborne illness outbreak investigations. The data can then be used to improve food safety

## Sign Up Today!

Sign up for the Environmental Health Services Newsletter for more timely and practical tools and resources for environmental health professionals at [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/news/newsletter.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/news/newsletter.html).

(Hlavsa et al., 2016). Reduce the risk for waterborne illness outbreaks, drowning, and chemical poisoning at public pools and other aquatic venues with CDC's free science-based Model Aquatic Health Code (MAHC) guidelines.

Almost all (9 in 10) Legionnaires' disease outbreaks were caused by problems preventable with more effective water management (Garrison et al., 2016). Learn how to create a water management program to reduce risk for Legionnaires' disease in the Preventing Legionnaires' Disease: A Training on *Legionella* Water Management Programs (PreventLD Training).

## Using Data to Improve Services and Address Environmental Hazards

The Understanding the Needs, Challenges, Opportunities, Vision, and Emerging Roles in Environmental Health (UNCOVER EH) (Figure 3) initiative surveyed 1,700 environmental health professionals across the nation, the first such assessment of the environmental health workforce. Data showed that environmental health professionals commonly work in multiple program areas, requiring unique technical and scientific expertise. Furthermore, 1 in 4 environmental health professionals plan to retire within 5 years (Gerding et al., 2019). Explore more information about this cooperative project with NEHA and Baylor University, including data collected from the web-based survey and subsequent workshop discussions, to learn more about research and workforce development needs in environmental health.

Environmental health professionals can leverage data to increase the impact of their services and inform best practices (Banerjee, Gerding, & Sarisky, 2018). Learn about our new Environmental Health Capacity (EHC) program to detect, prevent, and control environmental health hazards through data-driven, evidence-based approaches.

FIGURE 2

### Safe Water Resources



Learn how to keep your water resources safe, including recreational water, private wells, drinking water, and emergency water supplies, at [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/activities/water.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/activities/water.html).

FIGURE 3

### Understanding the Needs, Challenges, Opportunities, Vision, and Emerging Roles in Environmental Health (UNCOVER EH)



Use data-driven approaches to address environmental hazards and improve services with free resources at [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/activities/eh-practice-resources.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/activities/eh-practice-resources.html).

programs. In fact, NEARS data report that restaurants with norovirus outbreaks had smaller and shorter outbreaks when they had preventive practices such as cleaning policies, food safety training, and certified food safety managers on staff (Hoover et al., 2020).

## Addressing Threats to Health From Recreational Water and Private Wells

Water is both a basic need and a source of recreational enjoyment but it can carry contaminants such as *E. coli* and *Cryptosporidium*.

About 1 in 8 individuals in the U.S. get their drinking water from a private well (Dieter et al., 2018) and about 1 in 5 sampled private wells were found to be contaminated at levels that could affect health

(DeSimone, Hamilton, & Gilliom, 2009). Learn how to use the 10 Essential Environmental Public Health Services to build strong public health programs for safer well water with CDC's Safe Water Program Improvement e-Learning Series (SWPI) (Figure 2). Also, join the virtual Private Water Network (Figure 2) for resources on private water issues, including a discussion forum, resource library, event calendar, webinars, and newsletters. This community is offered in collaboration with the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA).

For recreational waters, 1 in 8 public pool inspections and 1 in 7 of public hot tub/spa inspections resulted in immediate closure because of at least one identified violation that represented a serious threat to public health

Environmental health professionals work behind the scenes to keep communities safe and our free resources are a great way to assist with that mission. These tools, along with the branch's practice-based research and guidance, are free and available on our branch website at [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs). 🐼

**Corresponding Author:** Elaine Curtiss, Public Health Analyst, National Center for Environmental Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 4700 Buford Highway, Atlanta, GA 30341. E-mail: [ecurtiss@cdc.gov](mailto:ecurtiss@cdc.gov).

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