

# GLOSSARY

Common Food Safety Terms Used  
by Public Health Agencies

## 1. TERMS TO DESCRIBE FOODBORNE ILLNESS

<b>Outbreak</b>	Two or more cases of foodborne illness linked by a common pathogen strain or suspected food.
<b>Cases</b>	People who got sick
<b>Pathogen</b>	A microorganism that can cause illness. This includes bacteria, viruses and parasites. They are commonly referred to as germs.
<b>STEC</b>	Acronym for 'Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli'. This is a type of E. coli that makes people sick. Most E. coli does not. E. coli is a kind of bacteria that are normally found in the guts of mammals and humans
<b>Strain</b>	A flexible term depending on context. Often people use it as the next level of granularity or specificity when talking about a pathogen. For example, O157:H7 is a strain of E. coli. But within O157:H7 there is still a lot of variation, so people can talk about a specific strain of O157:H7, for example, based on its whole genome sequence. (see below)
<b>Genetically Related Strain</b>	Used to indicate that people are sick from the same germ. This can also relate to the germ in the product, water etc.
<b>Whole Genome Sequencing</b>	A scientific technique that determines the genetic make-up of an organism. It allows scientists to tell how closely related organisms are. It's very similar to some of the ancestry testing available for people, that tells you who your genetic relatives are and starts to build a family tree.

## 2. TERMS TO DESCRIBE RESPONSE ACTIONS

<b>Recall</b>	An action taken by an individual company to remove from marketing channels specific products or SKUs produced within a certain timeframe because the product is violative (meaning it is believed to be adulterated or contaminated). Usually done on a voluntary (but not optional!) basis.
<b>Market Withdrawal</b>	An action taken by an individual company to withdraw product from marketing channels for reasons other than violative (e.g., for quality issues). Also done voluntarily.
<b>Safety Alert</b>	A communications vehicle used by the Centers for Disease Control to provide advice to consumers that stem from food safety outbreak investigations.
<b>Consumer Advisory</b>	When public health investigations are not able to traceback the source of a foodborne illness outbreak to a single company or brand of food. In this case, there is no individual company that can issue a recall.

### 3. OUTBREAK INVESTIGATION TERMS

<b>Traceback</b>	Investigation that starts with where a potentially contaminated product was purchased or consumed and attempts to follow that product back through marketing channels ultimately to the farm where it was produced.
<b>Epidemiologic Investigation</b>	A survey conducted by health professionals that seeks to determine what sick people ate more often than people who did not get sick.
<b>Onsite Inspection</b>	A term that refers to investigations done at a farm or facility identified by traceback which may be involved in the producing or marketing suspected products. This may be done during the outbreak or incident or afterward.
<b>Sampling</b>	Testing to determine the presence of pathogens. This may include suspect product in the homes of ill people; product from companies; soil, water, equipment, etc. on the farm.