

**Minnesota Department of Agriculture  
Food and Feed Safety Division**

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Version #: 2	Effective Date: 1/9/2017
Title: <b>Foodborne Illness Outbreak Investigation SOP</b>	

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**1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to describe the process for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's (MDA) Food and Feed Safety Division (FFSD) Rapid Response Team (RRT) and associated staff members performance of foodborne illness outbreak investigations associated with MDA-regulated food establishments based on identification by the Minnesota Department of Health.

**2. SCOPE**

This document applies to routine responsibilities of the RRT and associated staff members for routine foodborne illness outbreak investigations. For investigations not involving human illness, follow the procedures in *RESP.50.01 – Investigation Procedures SOP*. This does not apply to investigations for which an Incident Command System (ICS) has been activated. If ICS has been activated, follow the procedures in *RESP.50.04 – Incident Command System SOP*. The procedure does not cover inspection staff actions in the field. The procedure does not cover response to foodborne illness complaints submitted to MDA; for those procedures, see *FOOD.30.15 – Public Complaint SOP*.

**3. BACKGROUND**

MDA FFSD may initiate and coordinate actions in response to foodborne illness clusters or outbreaks that involve (or may involve) FFSD-regulated firms or products. MDA FFSD will be the lead agency when conducting an investigation at a food facility or farm under its jurisdiction (retail food facilities, food processing/manufacturing, or food warehouse). MDA is also the lead agency when conducting traceback or traceforward investigations (see *RESP.50.08 – Traceback and Traceforward SOP*).

Consumer complaints of potential foodborne illness received by MDA shall be referred to the Minnesota Foodborne Illness Hotline (1-877-FOOD ILL).

When a food-related illness from a food product regulated by MDA is reported, MDH is responsible for conducting the epidemiologic investigation. MDA collaborates in the investigation with MDH and plays the lead role in the traceback and/or on-site investigation of any MDA-regulated facility. If the suspected food is distributed interstate, the appropriate federal authority is notified: Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Minneapolis District Office (MIN-DO) or U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

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MDA then collaborates with FDA MIN-DO or USDA FSIS on response and field actions, including joint investigations.

**4. RESPONSIBILITY**

**RRT Coordinator** – The RRT Coordinator will be responsible for requesting personnel and resources necessary for the investigation, communicating situational updates and sharing information internally and to agency partners, and promoting collaboration between partner agencies during outbreak response. The RRT Coordinator reports to the Response, Training, and Outreach (RTO) Supervisor.

**RRT Investigator/Analyst** – The RRT Investigator/Analyst will be responsible for assisting the RRT Coordinator with the investigation and recording investigational objectives and actions. When requested, the RRT Investigator may lead the investigation in place of the RRT Coordinator. The RRT Investigator reports to the RTO Supervisor.

**Response, Training, and Outreach (RTO) Supervisor** – The RTO Supervisor will serve as a subject matter expert and will provide guidance on decision making when needed. The RTO Supervisor will maintain situational awareness via investigational updates from the RRT Coordinator and/or the RRT Investigator/Analyst.

**5. DEFINITIONS**

**Consumer Complaints** – Complaints made by the public regarding food products, facility, practices, labeling, and any related activities.

**Food** – Every ingredient used for, entering into the consumption of, or used or intended for use in the preparation of food, drink, confectionery, or condiment for humans or other animals, whether simple, mixed, or compound; and articles used as components of these ingredients (MN Statute 34A.01 Subd. 4).

**Manufacturer** – Any individual, firm, corporation, company, association, cooperative, or partnership who processes or manufactures raw materials and other food ingredients into food items, or who reprocesses food items or who package food for sale to others for resale. This includes those who extract, ferment, distill, pickle, bake, freeze, dry, smoke, grind, mix, stuff, pack, bottle, recondition, or otherwise treat or preserve food for sale to others for resale and also to salvage food processors.

**Person** – Any individual, firm, partnership, cooperative, society, joint stock association, association, company, or corporation and includes any officer, employee, agent trustee, receiver, assignee, or other similar business entity or representative of one of those entities (MN Statute 34A.01, Subd. 10).

**Place of Business** – Every location where food or food items are manufactured, processed, sold, stored, or handled including buildings, locations, permanent or portable structures, carnivals, circuses, fairs or any other permanent or temporary location. Any vehicle or similar mobile unit from which food is sold shall be considered a place of business for purposes of this selection if the food therefrom has been manufactured, packaged, or dispensed from bulk or processed in any manner thereon (MN Statute 28A.03 Subd. 4).

**Process** – The treatment of food substances in such a manner to change its properties with a view to preserving it, improving its quality, or making it functionally useful.

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**Retail Food Establishment** – Any individual, firm, corporation, company, association, cooperative, or partnership who sells food directly to a consumer to include the following definition of a “food establishment” (in full) from the proposed 2012 MN Retail Food Code 4626.0020 1-201.10: An operation that (a) stores, prepares, packages, serves, vends food directly to the consumer or otherwise provides food for human consumption such as a restaurant; satellite or catered feeding location; catering operation if the operation provides food directly to a consumer or to a conveyance used to transport people; market; vending location; conveyance used to transport people; institution; or food bank; and (b) relinquishes possession of food to a consumer directly or indirectly through a delivery service such as home delivery of grocery orders or restaurant takeout orders or delivery service that is provided by common carriers. “Retail food establishment” includes: (a) an element of the operation such as transportation vehicle or a central preparation facility that supplies a vending location or satellite feeding location unless the vending or feeding location is permitted by the regulatory authority; and (b) an operation that is conducted in a mobile, stationary, temporary or permanent facility or location; where consumption is on or off the premises; and regardless of whether there is a charge for the food.

## **6. PROCEDURES**

### **6.1 Immediate Actions**

#### RRT Coordinator

- 6.1.1** Obtain a full briefing of the outbreak from MDH and clarify the immediate requested investigational actions and expectations with MDH as referenced in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between MDH and MDA. When MDA investigational actions are identified, begin investigation within one (1) business day.
- 6.1.2** Identify relevant contacts for the investigation. When necessary, ensure maintenance of a contact list in the OneNote Investigation notebook.
- 6.1.3** Notify the RTO Supervisor and other appropriate supervisors and managers immediately if the outbreak involves product manufactured in Minnesota.
- 6.1.4** Identify the necessary resources to initiate immediate actions. This may include inspection staff required for a field investigation, environmental assessment, or sample collection assignment. If the resources required exceed the capacity of any one unit or program, or if multiple programs are involved, consult *RESP 50.04 – Incident Command System SOP* to determine whether and how ICS should be initiated. If a Minnesota manufacturer is involved and an investigation or environmental assessment is warranted, see *RESP.50.01 – Investigation Procedures – Food or Environmental Contamination SOP*.
- 6.1.5** Contact other FFSD programs, MDA divisions, and/or external agencies (state, federal, local) that may be involved. Support collaboration with partner agencies if the outbreak requires a joint response. Contact private firms (retail, manufacturing) as necessary. See *RESP.50.05 – RRT Communications SOP* for more information.
- 6.1.6** Brief the RTO Supervisor on a routine basis.

#### RRT Investigator/Analyst

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- 6.1.7.** Obtain a full briefing of the outbreak from MDH and/or the RRT Coordinator and begin recording of outbreak investigation in OneNote. When necessary, maintain a contact list in the OneNote Investigation notebook.

**6.2 Intermediate Actions**

RRT Coordinator

- 6.2.1** Initiate traceback within seven (7) days of identifying a credible potential food source by contacting or visiting retail food establishments, manufacturers, or wholesalers to review and obtain records that document the chain of distribution for the product(s) of concern. Document collection in the field may be assigned to inspection staff. For specific traceback investigation procedures, see *RESP.50.08 – Traceback and Traceforward SOP*.
- 6.2.2** Brief internal and external agency contacts and share traceback and investigational documentation as applicable. When needed, contact private firms and communicate the specific actions and data requests along with general investigational information and applicable points of contact.
- 6.2.3** Continue to monitor resource needs as outlined in 6.1.4 above.
- 6.2.4** Ensure a new Investigation Summary has been uploaded to the RRT SharePoint site and a new OneNote notebook has been created for the investigation to maintain a daily summary of objectives and actions. Ensure all documentation associated with the investigation is maintained on the RRT SharePoint site.

RRT Investigator/Analyst

- 6.2.5** Assist RRT Coordinator in conducting traceback investigation. For specific traceback investigation procedures, see *RESP.50.08 – Traceback and Traceforward SOP*.
- 6.2.6** Assist RRT Coordinator as requested in briefing brief internal and external agency contacts as applicable.
- 6.2.7** Create a new Investigation Summary and upload it to the RRT SharePoint site. Create a new OneNote notebook for the investigation to maintain a daily summary of objectives and actions.

**6.3 Extended Actions and Post-Response**

RRT Coordinator

- 6.3.1** Ensure the Investigation OneNote notebook is updated on a regular basis.
- 6.3.2** Continue to brief internal and external agency contacts and share documentation as applicable.
- 6.3.3** Ensure all relevant documents have been compiled in electronic format and are uploaded to the RRT SharePoint site.
- 6.3.4** Notify the RTO Supervisor when the investigation is closed. Also notify the following, as applicable: FFSD Program Managers, Compliance Supervisor, and external agencies that partnered in the investigation.

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**6.3.5** Distribute final program investigation report(s), including an ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT if completed, to relevant agencies such as the Minnesota Department of Health that are responsible for reporting contributing factors and antecedents to CDC, and as stipulated in the *MOU with MDH*.

**6.3.6** Assess the need for conducting an after action review (AAR) within two (2) weeks of the close of the investigation and oversee the completion of an AAR. See *RESP.50.03 – After Action Review SOP* for more details.

RRT Investigator/Analyst

**6.3.6** Update the Investigation OneNote notebook on a regular basis.

**6.3.7** Compile all relevant documents in electronic format and upload to the RRT SharePoint site on a regular basis.

**7. RELATED DOCUMENTS (includes References, Attachments)**

RESP.50.04 – Incident Command System SOP

RESP.50.01 – Investigation Procedures – Food or Environmental Contamination SOP

RESP.50.03 – After Action Review SOP

RESP.50.05 – RRT Communications SOP

RESP.50.08 – Traceback and Traceforward SOP

MOU with MDH

MOU MDA with MDA-LSD

Documents-Records Request Template on SharePoint

Investigation Summary Template on SharePoint

**8. EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS NEEDED**

N/A

**9. SAFETY**

N/A

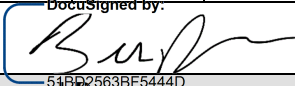
**10. CIRCULATION**

This document is circulated to the following: RRT Staff, FFSD Food Program Managers, and the FFSD Division Director. The current version will be stored electronically on the FFSD document control site.

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**11. APPROVAL/DOCUMENT HISTORY**

Document History		
Version #	Status (I, R)	Change History
<b>1</b>	<b>R</b>	Previous name FOOD.50.02 – Foodborne Illness Outbreak Investigation SOP and transferred to RESP.50.02. Updates made due to division structure changes from DFID to FFSD and main responsibilities shifting to the Rapid Response Team/Response Unit.
<b>2</b>	<b>R</b>	Addition of “consumer complaints” definition, combined RRT Coordinator and RRT Investigator/Analyst roles into each section, and post response language added to sections 6.3
DocuSigned by: 		1/9/2017
<b>Approved By:</b>		<b>Date</b>
<b>Approved By:</b>		<b>Date</b>

I = Initial document; R = Revised document