



KEY POINTS

for Successful Foodborne Outbreak Detection and Investigation

INTERVIEWING GUIDANCE

Completion of detailed interviews of cases in surveillance or as part of clusters is the first step in solving an outbreak. Rapid interviewing combined with laboratory data will lead to successful investigations. Below are some key points for conducting foodborne disease interviews.

1. Training

- Familiarize yourself with interview forms - know what you're asking and why
- Listen to a more experienced interviewer conduct an interview and then have them listen to you
- Have a more experienced interviewer review your completed interviews and provide feedback

2. Prepare

- Read up on the pathogen – the Red Book and Control of Communicable Diseases Manual are good references
 - Understand associations with certain species or serotypes (e.g., *Salmonella enterica* Subsp. IIIa/IIIb is likely reptile-associated)
 - Check to see if the case is part of a current cluster – there may be exposures that you need to ask about specifically
- Items to have in front of you when you interview include:
 - Paper/pen
 - Calendar
 - All necessary interview forms
 - Summary table for the pathogen of interest – this can include incubation, duration, symptoms, important sequelae or complications, number of cases per year, and common risk factors
- Have a plan for non-English speaking cases

3. Starting the interview

- Cover the key points of consent for the interview – who you are, why you're calling, what you'll use the information for, who has access to it, and whether there are benefits or repercussions for the choice to participate in an interview
- Try to conduct interviews during the first contact, but if necessary schedule a later date/time
- Be thankful for their time and show empathy for their illness
- Make note of the onset date and the collection date – be sure that the data you're collecting make sense with the date of their visit to the doctor and clarify if needed
- Continually remind the case what week you're discussing – use a calendar
- Manage your time – get the most important pieces of the interview if they are in a rush and let them know you'll call back later (especially important for outbreak or cluster cases)

4. During the interview

- Take notes if the person skips ahead of you in the interview to avoid asking something more than once
- Use events to “anchor” a case’s memory and aid in recall – if they went to a family reunion, what did they do for meals the day before and after, etc.
- Ask them to check on-line bank statements for grocery store purchase dates or restaurant outings
- Piece the details together in a coherent story
 - Dates should match in different parts of the interview
 - Events should also match – if one part of the interview says they attended a wedding on Saturday night and another part says they went out to eat Saturday night, you need to clarify the dates and times
 - Make sure other questions/answers are consistent – if they told you they ate chicken salad at a deli, they should also answer “yes” to chicken consumption later in the interview
- **Get details!** Brand names, locations where foods are purchased, and dates of purchase are very important! Get visual details if brands are unknown (e.g., type of packaging, color of box or bag, picture or design of logo, etc.)
- Ask questions about foods mentioned by other cases in a cluster, but be careful not to lead – if multiple cases mention a restaurant, be sure to ask about that restaurant along with all other restaurants mentioned by cases or other similar restaurants in the area
- Make note of special descriptions of foods (e.g., seasonal gift package, multi-pack from a warehouse store, food eaten every day for lunch, special food rarely eaten)
- Ask for member numbers for grocery stores, warehouse stores, and coops as needed
- Note special dietary restrictions or unusual foods consumed
- Be prepared to redirect when interview questions lead to rambling stories – be polite, but stay on task
- Be factual – if you’re uncomfortable with a question, it will be uncomfortable for the case
- If the case lives in a facility with a dining room or prepared meals, get the menu for the week in question or get specific foods consumed by the case
- As a last resort, if they are unable to give a good food history, get regularly consumed foods and typical foods eaten in a week

5. Follow up

- After the interview, check over all of your notes, fill in all the blanks
- If you’re missing a piece of information or realize an inconsistency, call back, apologize, and clarify the mistake

6. Re-interview

- Re-interview cases that are part of clusters if you need more information and as new information becomes available

Additional Resources:

<http://redbook.solutions.aap.org>

American Academy of Pediatrics Red Book – Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases

<http://apha.org/ccdm>

American Public Health Association Control of Communicable Diseases Manual



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