

The Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net) program, developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), conducts research designed to 1) identify and understand environmental factors associated with food- and water-borne illness and outbreaks, and 2) identify and understand the strengths and weaknesses of environmental public health regulatory programs responsible for food and water safety. EHS-Net data collections are typically conducted in response to food- and water-borne illness outbreaks, and provide timely data on the causes of outbreaks, including environmental factors associated with outbreaks. These data are essential to environmental public health regulators' efforts to respond more effectively to outbreaks and prevent future, similar outbreaks.

CDC requests OMB approval of a new retail food service worker food handling practices study. To identify and understand the environmental factors associated with foodborne illness, we need to collect data on food handling practices, policies, and environments from those responsible for preparing and cooking food. Recent studies have indicated that retail food service establishments are an important source of food-borne illnesses (Friedman et al., 2004; Kassenborg et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2004; Olsen et al., 2000). Thus, some of our data collection efforts will focus on retail food service establishments. These data collections will involve interviewing and/or observing food service establishment managers and workers to learn about their food preparation practices and policies and environmental factors related to those practices and policies. This data collection focuses on food cooling practices in food service establishments. Improper cooling of food contributed to 44% of 1,918 foodborne illness outbreaks occurring in the U.S. over a 20-year period (Bryan, 1988). From 2001 to 2005, improper cooling was identified as a contributing factor in over 500 confirmed foodborne outbreaks (internal CDC data). Indeed, improper cooling is considered to be the most frequent contributing factor to foodborne illness outbreaks. Data indicate that improper cooling is a significant source of foodborne illness and needs to be the focus of prevention and intervention efforts.