

# NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

*The National Connection for Local Public Health*

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*Media Contacts:*

Becky Wexler (GWU and NACCHO)  
301-280-5729  
[BWexler@burnesscommunications.com](mailto:BWexler@burnesscommunications.com)

Paula Steib (ASTHO)  
202-371-9090, ext. 1638  
[psteib@astho.org](mailto:psteib@astho.org)

## **State and Local Officials Collaborate to Keep Nation's Food Safe**

### ***June 17 Symposium to Kick Off New Project***

Washington, D.C.—Supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, three organizations representing public health and food safety officials are working together to enhance the contribution state and local agencies make to the nation's food safety system. They will launch the new effort at a public symposium on June 17, which they are convening with The George Washington University (GWU) School of Public Health and Health Services.

Each of the three organizations – The Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO), the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) and the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) – represent state and local officials who work at the front lines of food safety protection. Their members play central roles in foodborne illness surveillance and outbreak response, regulation and inspection of food processing and retail establishments, and food safety education.

The work of state and local agencies is already critical to the success of the nation's food safety system and will be increasingly important in the future, according to GWU Research Professor Michael R. Taylor, who served formerly in senior management roles at the Food and Drug and

Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. "The vision being developed at the federal level of a modern, risk-based food safety system that is effective in preventing foodborne illness depends on strengthening the roles and capacities of state and local agencies and improving coordination and collaboration among food safety officials at all levels of government," said Taylor, who is coordinating the new project.

"Thousands of local public health authorities provide critical oversight through inspections, technical assistance, and education for food establishments such as restaurants and grocery stores to prevent foodborne illness," said NACCHO member Scott Holmes, manager of the Environmental Public Health Division in the Lincoln-Lancaster County (Neb.) Department of Health. "Any comprehensive national food safety reform must address the resource and other capacity needs that affect the success of local agencies in protecting people from foodborne illnesses."

The extensive interaction that already exists among state and local agencies and the federal government provides a strong foundation on which to build, according to Joseph Corby, director of the Division of Food Safety and Inspection in the state of New York's Department of Agriculture and Markets. "It is essential as food safety reform is debated at the federal level that state and local food safety roles be strengthened and be better integrated with efforts at the national level," said Corby.

"Preventing foodborne illness is a core function of health departments nationwide," said ASTHO President David Sundwall, executive director of the Utah Department of Health. "Enhancing the state and local roles in the national food safety system both protects food safety and strengthens our nation's public health system."

The June 17 event is the first step in this new collaboration. The symposium will bring together a wide range of food safety leaders to highlight current state and local food safety roles and opportunities to enhance them. Speakers include USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety Richard Raymond, FDA Associate Commissioner for Regulatory Affairs Margaret Glavin, state and local food safety regulators (Joe Corby of New York and David Ludwig of Maricopa County, Arizona), state and local health officials (David Bergmire-Sweat of North Carolina and Joseph Russell of Flathead County, Montana), David Gombas of the United Fresh Produce Association, Bob Brackett of the Grocery Manufacturers Association, and Caroline Smith DeWaal of the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Following the symposium, ASTHO and NACCHO will convene a workshop on July 1 to develop specific proposals for enhancing state and local roles in foodborne illness surveillance and outbreak response, and AFDO will convene a workshop on July 14-15 during which participants will develop proposals on food safety regulation and inspection at state and local levels.

In October, the proposals developed at the workshops – which could include changes in law, policy, programs and resources, as well as other ideas for building a more effective, nationally integrated food safety system – will be discussed at a second public symposium.

The June 17 symposium will be held from 8:30 am-12:30 pm in the Media and Public Affairs Building on the GWU campus in Washington, D.C., at 21<sup>st</sup> and H St., NW. Media interested in attending should contact Becky Wexler, Burness Communications, at [bwexler@burnesscommunications.com](mailto:bwexler@burnesscommunications.com) to register.

Members of the public can RSVP for the June 17 symposium by submitting their names and organizations via email to [foodsafety@gwumc.edu](mailto:foodsafety@gwumc.edu).