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The Changing Epidemiology of Foodborne Disease in Australia.

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The epidemiology of foodborne disease has changed considerably in past decades. There have been changes in food consumption patterns, recognition of new disease agents, more widespread outbreaks and a greater public awareness of food borne disease. To learn more about the changing epidemiology of foodborne disease the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) funded a national collaboration— called OzFoodNet—linking health agencies and epidemiological research. OzFoodNet has four aims, which are to estimate the national burden of foodborne illness, learn more about the causes of these diseases, identify risky foods and handling practices, and train people to investigate foodborne disease. OzFoodNet is conducting national studies on the prevalence of diarrhoea in the community, the enhancement of outbreak reporting, laboratory faecal screening practices, risk factors for common foodborne illnesses, and specific laboratory subtyping projects. Preliminary results from the diarrhoeal survey show that more than 10% of people have experienced gastroenteritis in the month prior to interview, which represents a huge burden of illness in the community. Health agencies conduct routine surveillance of foodborne diseases, which display marked seasonal and geographic differences. In 2000, there were 13,595 cases of *Campylobacter* infection notified to the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System, representing an increase of 7.5% from the previous year. The National Enteric Pathogen Surveillance Scheme has tracked changes in *Salmonella* serovars over three decades. The data show year-to-year fluctuations in the frequency of reported serovars. In 2001, *Salmonella* Typhimurium phage types 126 and 170 emerged as foodborne diseases occurring at higher incidence in multiple jurisdictions. Australia also experienced two major *Salmonella* outbreaks in 2001 linked to imported foods. One was due to antibiotic resistant *S. Typhimurium* 104 associated with imported Turkish helva, and the other due to *S. Stanley* and was linked to imported Chinese peanuts. Foodborne disease is a continuing global challenge and requires appropriate surveillance and epidemiological research to control this major public health problem.