
ONE HEALTH IN FOOD SAFETY

Interview with Carmen Savelli, Technical Officer
Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses, WHO

Full video link: <https://goo.gl/3dJ53H>

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Description: In this interview, Carmen Savelli shared information about Infosan, a global network that aims to foster food safety. He presented some examples on how Infosan encourages a one health approach and provided country experiences on the importance of this approach during food safety emergency response. He also emphasized the value of multisectoral and multidisciplinary coordination from the beginning, during planning period in order to move smoothly.

Interview transcript:

YVB: Can you please introduce yourself?

CS: My name is Carmen Savelli, I am a Technical Officer in the Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses. The Department has the mission of lowering the global burden foodborne disease. I have been there for the last seven years, working as part of the Secretariat of the International Food Safety Authorities Network (Infosan). My background is in Biomedical Science and public health epidemiology and my training in Canada, that's where I was working before coming to Geneva, I was working at the Public Health Agency of Canada, dealing mainly with response to foodborne disease outbreaks.

YVB: Can you tell us about INFOSAN?

CS: Infosan is the International Food Safety Authorities Network and it's a network that is managed jointly by the food and agriculture organization of the UN, FAO, as well as WHO and it was launched in 2004. It is a global network that really aims to foster a global community of practice of food safety officials from around the world. The network has four main aims: the first one is to promote the rapid exchange of information during a food safety event. So that might mean when there is a foodborne

disease outbreak involving a food that cross borders, produced in one country, contaminated and exported to another country, or might involve an event where you have a contaminated food that it has been identified in absence of illness. So in either those cases the network functions to promote this exchange of information between members of the network, so they can implement risk management and measures to remove the contaminated food from the market. The second aim of Infosan is to share information about food safety that could be of potential global interest. Examples of this might be the release of a report that is of a particular interest on food safety, like the recent global estimates of foodborne disease burden or a scientific finding that identifies antimicrobial resistance in a foodborne bacteria. So those kinds of new developments that could be of potential interest, we exchange through the network. The third aim is about promoting partnerships between countries and other networks. Infosan is a global food safety network, but there is also a lot of regional networks that operate in different parts of the world, so we collaborate closely with our European colleagues, specifically with the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) as well as the Emerging Risk Exchange Network (EREN), those are both European networks. But beyond that, we work closely with our colleagues at the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum and other colleagues at the African Union to move forward on their food safety agenda. We also encourage our members to coordinate with each other directly, by sharing experiences and best practices and lessons learnt and recently we have encouraged that by promoting a technical webinar series that Infosan members in Canada delivered, which was in eight part series that was participated by Infosan members in more than 60 countries around the world. And the fourth aim of Infosan is really to help countries build their capacities, to manage food safety emergencies. We do this by organizing training, workshops, developing exercises, online simulations as well as developing technical guidance. For example, we have developed guidance for countries on improving national food recall systems, as well as applying risk analysis principles during food safety emergencies. Those are the four main aims of Infosan and together now we have more than 500 members around the world and we have 188 member states participating in the network.

YVB: Can you give examples on how Infosan encourages a One Health approach?

CS: Because food safety is seldom dealt with by any single agency in a country, we encourage the designation of one emergency contact point in the agency responsible for coordination during a food safety emergency. In addition we encourage the designation of other focal points from other different agencies, sectors involved in some aspect of national food safety along the farm to fork continuum. In that way it really does encourage this multisectoral and multidisciplinary membership that brings together all the relevant agencies that are working on food safety at the national level. Because of this our membership is quite broad and includes members from Ministries of Health, but also agriculture, trade, and many others. Actually, few years ago we worked closely with our partners at the World Organization for animal Health (OIE) and we engaged them to get their focal points for food safety working in veterinary services to join Infosan, so in that way we really have representative membership from all different sectors involved in food safety at the national level. It is different in

every country, depending on their national set up, and those members can communicate with each other using our online portal, which we call Infosan community website, so they can contact one another and they can also be in touch with the all the other members located around the world.

YVB: Can you give examples of what countries have done to improve food safety?

CS: I think that one of the most important things that we have seen in recent years is that countries have been using Infosan as kind of framework at the national level to bring together different sectors, to develop national food safety emergency response plans. I know countries like Thailand, for example, have utilized guidance that was developed by WHO, FAO, on developing national food safety emergency response plans, and they brought together all the different Infosan members in the country that form a kind of multi-agency coordination group. By just working together on the plan, they were really bolstering their preparedness for when an actual food safety emergency would happen in the future. And I think, obviously, getting everybody involved from the beginning in the planning process is going to make easy to actually implement the plan if all different players have been part of producing it. In addition to that, we have also seen recently some national workshops in countries like Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, where they have used Infosan and all the members that are part of Infosan to come together and talk about food safety issues at the national level. It is kind of as a first step to working together, realizing that maybe they haven't been talking to each other as much or understanding the roles and responsibilities as they relate to food safety and food safety emergency response. I think Infosan has been a useful framework to start that conversation in some places, but more than that what I think has been useful in the last couple of years is that we have seen countries that report having like a weekly call, for example, with all the different stakeholders at the national level who are dealing with food safety. So even in the absence of food safety crisis they still meet regularly and talk about the different intelligence they have gathered so that, in advance of some emergency happening, they are already familiar with one and another and can kind of anticipate emergencies before they happen. I think that working together can really help, prepare them for the time when the actual emergency comes. In addition, we have facilitated the sharing information and coordination at the national level between different Infosan members. We encourage them to use the Infosan community website and, specifically, the group function on there, which allows members to create a small forum with just members from their countries, for example, and then encourage to share documents and information that it would just be relevant to their national situation.

YVB: How does Infosan support the implementation of IHR?

CS: Infosan actually also supports the implementation of the International Health Regulations and by participating in Infosan, it is often used as the conduit through which members states are reporting food safety events under the IHR. So in this way we are also encouraging very close collaboration between the Infosan emergency contact point and the national IHR focal point because then if they are coordinating

they can eliminate this kind of double burden of reporting and parallel lines of communication that might get confused during a food safety emergency.

YVB: Why is it important to take a One Health approach in responding to food safety emergency?

CS: Responding to food safety events requires One Health approach because the identification of the event can actually happen at any stage along the whole food chain, at the level of production, on a farm, for example, all the way up to consumption and after consumption when you have human cases of illness identified. So no matter when the event is identified, at what stage you need to engage everyone else along the whole food chain in different sectors to come together to get the whole picture. And without engaging the other sectors you won't know what the source was or what interventions should be put in place and you won't be able to do that effectively. So Infosan really encourages the designation of all different sectors as part of the network at the national level, so that it starts building this relationship so that when a food safety emergency happens everybody knows their roles and responsibilities. We have infosan member in a 188 countries. If you are not sure who the Infosan members are in your country, you can always get in touch with us and we can let you know. But, if you are working in an agency on issues related to food safety and you think like to join us as focal point, please contact the Infosan Secretariat and we can help facilitate the designation process.