The RRT Program uses a cooperative agreement vehicle to support RRT development and maintenance. Total funding for awards made in FY20 is ~$5,100,000.

The desired outcome of RRT development is to minimize the time between agency notification of a human or animal food contamination event and implementation of effective control measures. To accomplish this, RRTs develop and maintain processes to:

- Prepare for and effectively respond to foodborne illness outbreaks and other food emergencies.
- Enhance intra-agency and inter-agency collaboration and communication.
- Jointly train and exercise staff to be ready to respond to events when they occur.
- Identify potential preventive practices to reduce foodborne illness and injury.
- Establish national best practices and tools that can be shared with other states to improve their response to food emergencies.

More information is available on our website: Rapid Response Teams - Program Information

What are RRTs?

RRTs are multi-agency, multi-disciplinary teams that operate using Incident Command System (ICS)/National Incident Management System (NIMS) principles within an integrated or coordinated response structure to respond to human and animal food emergencies.

Why establish RRTs?

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RRTs are one of our most successful examples of how an integrated food safety system should work. The best part is that it’s not overly complex: Provide a small amount of resources to states and then put experienced, trained federal and state investigators in the same room and ask them to come up with creative ways to investigate outbreaks.

– Jeff Farrar, Director of Intergovernmental Relations and Partnerships, FDA Office of Food Policy and Response

Interested in the RRT Manual? Download it here
In the fall of 2019, an outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 sickened 167 people from 27 states. *E. coli* outbreaks linked to leafy greens are a recurring issue. RRT actions taken to protect public health in response to this outbreak included:

**SMarRRT (State of Maryland RRT):** On November 6, 2019, Maryland Dept. of Health (MDH) was notified by the Baltimore County Health Department of 2 cases of STEC from individuals who reported eating salad kits from a local big box store. Wicomico County Health Department (WCHD) also reported ill residents who ate salad kits from the same big box chain. On November 13th, WCHD collected an unopened Ready Pac Bistro® Bowl Chicken Caesar Salad purchased by an ill patient and submitted it to the MDH Laboratories Administration for analysis. On November 18, 2019, MDH announced that *E. coli* O157:H7 had been isolated from the salad kit. Traceback of the product identified romaine from the Salinas Valley as the source. Prior to this positive sample, there was no evidence to implicate a specific type or source of leafy greens in this outbreak.

**Wisconsin RRT:** On December 6, 2019, the Wisconsin Dept. of Health Services announced that *E. coli* O157:H7 was identified in a sample of unopened Fresh Express® brand Leafy Green Romaine salad purchased by an ill patient. The sample was collected by the La Crosse County Health Department, analyzed by the Wisconsin Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, and whole genome sequencing of the isolate was performed by the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene. Traceback of this product also identified romaine from the Salinas Valley as the source.

- Industry partnerships played a critical role in solving this outbreak: the retailer that sold the product advised the complainant to contact the local health department about a potential sample, and alerted state officials so they could work with the local health department to coordinate sample collection, shipment and laboratory analysis. This sample might never have been collected without this proactive action on the part of the retailer.

The *E. coli* O157:H7 recovered from the Wisconsin and Maryland samples was highly related by whole genome sequencing to the outbreak strain.

Swift action by RRTs to coordinate sample collection, share laboratory analytical packages, and conduct rapid traceback on positive samples provided the evidence necessary to narrow the FDA and CDC consumer advisory to romaine from the Salinas Valley region. This avoided the need for a recommendation against consuming all romaine right before Thanksgiving and benefited both consumers and industry. In May 2020, FDA published a report of factors potentially contributing to the contamination of romaine, detailing findings from the federal and state investigation in the Salinas Valley area of California.