

NEWS RELEASE

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Survey Shows Americans Don't Realize Chicken and Beef Are Often Infected with Feces

Doctors Petition USDA to Ensure "Feces-Free" Meat or Issue Biohazard Label

Washington, D.C.—A new study shows that 84 percent of adults have no idea that the primary source of salmonella, campylobacter, E. coli, and other foodborne pathogens on poultry and meat is animal feces. The survey of 1,000 men and women was completed during the period of July 26-29, 2001, by Opinion Research Corporation International on behalf of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM). Foodborne illnesses are at epidemic levels in the United States; the Centers for Disease Control estimate there are at least 76 million cases each year, usually from consumption of animal products.

"Our findings show the vast majority of Americans do not understand there are feces on meat and poultry," says PCRM staff attorney Mindy Kursban. "In fact, there's a major disconnect in the public consciousness between the foodborne illnesses that sicken so many of us and their originating cause—animal excrement."

Survey respondents answered the following question: *"When salmonella and other disease-causing bacteria are found on meat and poultry, which of the following do you think BEST describes where these bacteria originally came from?"*

The answers were as follows:

- **They [foodborne pathogens] came from animal blood.** 10 percent
- **They came from dirty hands.**
19 percent
- **They are naturally present in the meat.**
17 percent
- **They are naturally present in the animal's skin.**
9 percent
- **They came from animal feces.**

16 percent

- **They came from dirty air in a slaughter house.**

15 percent

- **Didn't think any of these were the right answer or didn't know.**

13 percent

Statistically, respondents with college degrees, a household income equal to or greater than \$50,000, or residence in a metropolitan area were more likely to know that feces are the originating source of disease-causing bacteria.

The survey's release coincides with PCRM's filing of a petition calling on the U.S. Department of Agriculture to protect consumers against feces-contaminated poultry and meat.

PCRM's petition asks the government to declare feces an adulterant—an action that would greatly strengthen federal meat safety regulations. PCRM also proposes that until the government can guarantee Americans feces-free food, all poultry and meat products should carry a biohazard label. Such a procedure is similar to how medical waste is treated.

Founded in 1985, PCRM is a national health organization dedicated to promoting preventive medicine and higher standards in medical research, education, and practice.