



THE BURDEN OF FOODBORNE DISEASE ATTRIBUTABLE TO CHEMICAL CONTAMINANTS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Cairo, Egypt

Sunday, 18 October 2026

INTRODUCTION

In June 2026, the World Health Organization released updated global, regional and national estimates of the burden of foodborne diseases for 2000–2021. The estimates cover 42 hazards, including nine chemical hazards: aflatoxins B1 and M1, inorganic arsenic, lead, methylmercury, cadmium, dioxins, peanut allergy and cassava cyanide. The estimates indicate that foodborne chemical hazards caused approximately 501,000 illnesses and 36,000 deaths in the Eastern Mediterranean Region in 2021. This corresponds to an estimated loss of 1,340,000 disability-adjusted life years (DALYs).

Chemical hazards represent a substantial but previously underrecognized component of this burden. The updated estimates identify inorganic arsenic and lead as leading contributors to the global burden attributable to foodborne chemical hazards, with a substantial share occurring among adults and being associated with cardiovascular outcomes. Among children under five years of age, methylmercury contributes significantly to the burden attributable to foodborne chemical hazards, particularly through its effects on neurodevelopment and intellectual functioning.

Foodborne disease burden estimates provide a population-health perspective, as well as additional useful insights compared with traditional risk assessment approaches. They can help countries identify priority hazards, direct limited resources towards interventions with the greatest health impact and strengthen the evidence base for risk management decisions.

This side event will provide an opportunity to share the latest evidence directly with risk managers at the margins of CCCF19, where international food standards and risk management measures for contaminants in food are discussed.

Time (Cairo)	Title	Speaker
13:00-13:05	Opening remarks	Dr Osama Ali Maher, Acting Regional Adviser for Climate Change, Health and Environment, WHO EMRO.

13:05-13:20	WHO estimates 2026 edition results for chemical hazards in food.	Dr Luc Ingenbleek, Technical Officer Food Safety and Nutrition, WHO HQ.
13:20-13:30	The regional burden of foodborne diseases attributed to chemicals.	Dr Eva Inam Al Zein, Technical Officer, Food and Chemical Safety, WHO EMRO.
13:30-13:50	Eastern Mediterranean perspectives on the burden of foodborne chemical hazards	Dr Fadi Al Natour, former FERG member (2021-2025), Abu Dhabi Agriculture and Food Safety Authority, UAE.
13:50-14:05	Bridging public health evidence with Codex and national action.	Dr Intessar Al Gharibi, Chair of the Codex Coordinating Committee for the Near East, Food Safety and Quality Center, Sultanate of Oman.
14:05-14:20	Dietary lead exposure in the Eastern Mediterranean: pathways, and risk reduction approaches.	Dr Alissa Pries, Principal Advisor for Food Policy and Environment at Resolve to Save Lives.
14:20-14:45	Moderated discussion	Dr Eva Inam Al Zein, Technical Officer, Food and Chemical Safety, WHO EMRO.