

EMERGING RISK INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Enhancing Food Safety in New Zealand

Signals

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A quarterly brief on emerging food safety issues (Apr–Jun 2026)

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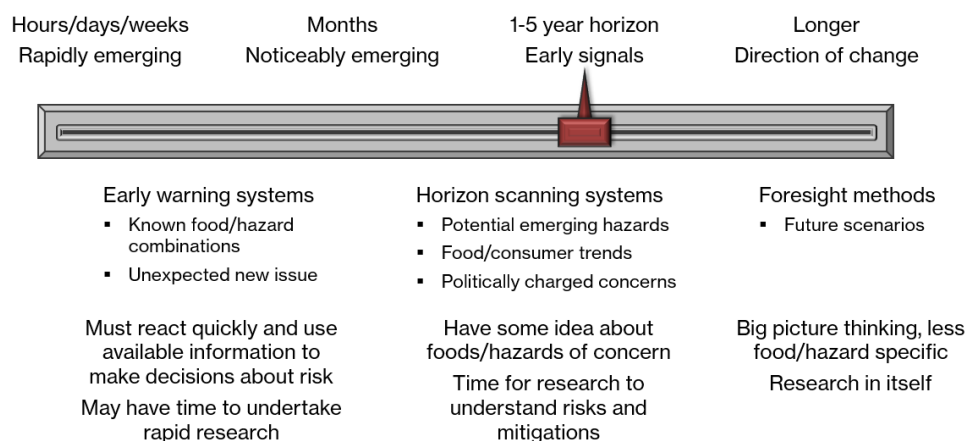
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The influence of timeframes on emerging issue perceptions

It is interesting to reflect on what constitutes an emerging issue for different people, and hence the approach and timescale required. Early warning systems are used to support rapid responses, e.g. to an outbreak or increased non-compliant test results.

Horizon scanning is used to detect signals of potential near-future issues, typically linked to identifiable foods and hazards (the focus of ERIS). Foresight techniques take a longer view, exploring possible futures and identifying ways to avoid or reduce future risks.



News from the network

Two reports by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations describe agrifood system trends with potential food safety implications. First, an examination of recycled plastics and alternative food contact materials emphasised the importance of ensuring that chemical migration to food is managed. Second, the 2026 Global Report on Food Crises showed increased food insecurity and malnutrition, driven by conflict, extreme weather and economic shocks. Food insecurity deprioritises food safety.

The European Food Safety's emerging risk networks met during June to share information on foresight activities across a wide range of topics. Among the issues discussed were risks from: changing exposure to known hazards (e.g. hydrocyanic acid, mycotoxins, *Cryptosporidium* spp.); the blurring of the line between

foods and supplements (pro-pre-post biotics); advanced technologies (e.g. insect-mediated treatments, AI-driven food safety controls); and food system changes (antimicrobial concerns from reduced zinc in pig feed). EFSA also outlined its progress towards issuing a scientific opinion on the health risks posed by microplastics in food, which includes considering how these particles act as vectors of antimicrobial resistant bacteria.

In the USA, federal and state lawmakers are seeking greater transparency around the evidence food companies use to support Generally Recognised As Safe (GRAS) designations. This could lead to some GRAS ingredients being re-assessed as unsafe.

Links: FAO reports on [Food Crises](#) and [food contact materials](#), EFSA [EREN](#) and [StaDG-ER](#) meeting reports, USA legal firm [GRAS article](#)

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Summary of activities

Of interest since Issue 11 were:

- 4 emerging issues concerning food or the food industry.
- Signals prompting updates to 22 identified emerging risks.
- 27 signals that did not meet the requirement of being a foodborne emerging risk to human health.

NZFSSRC members will decide if they want to undertake actions on these signals or identified emerging issues.

Featured emerging risks and issues

Zoonotic risk from covert mortality nodavirus (CMNV). CMNV was first identified as a cause of disease in shrimp. The virus has since been found in other aquatic organisms. Now in humans, CMNV has been linked to an emerging eye disease, mainly contracted through handling aquatic animals. Research is needed to understand whether CMNV could also cause illness when people eat raw aquatic animals.

Pharmaceuticals and illicit drugs in aquatic foods.

Pharmaceuticals and illicit drugs are biologically active compounds that can enter aquatic environments, mainly with human wastewater. Antidepressants, antihistamines, amphetamine, heroin and other drugs have been found in aquatic species such as shellfish, fish and seaweeds. So far, dietary exposure assessments have not shown a consumer health risk, but important uncertainties remain, particularly over long-term dietary exposure or exposure to drug mixtures in food.

Free-living amoeba (FLA) as protectors of foodborne pathogens. FLA are common microorganisms found in water, soil, and food-related environments. They can survive harsh conditions, allowing them to persist for long periods and withstand cleaning or disinfection processes. Like a protective “Trojan horse”, FLA can engulf foodborne pathogens and protect them from environmental stresses and even heat treatment. FLA have been detected on fresh produce and in food processing environments, where they may contribute to the persistence and spread of foodborne pathogens, potentially reducing the effectiveness of standard food control measures.

New information on selected identified issues

- **Liquid crystal monomers (LCMs) in the environment:** Scandinavian studies found LCMs around e-waste recycling facilities but not in a non-targeted set of human blood samples. [Swedish Toxicological Council \(2026\)](#)
- **Microplastics and nanoplastics in food:** A randomised controlled trial found that dietary interventions to minimise plastic exposure significantly decreased urinary markers of plastic exposure. [Harray et al. \(2026\)](#)
- **Glycerol in slush ice drinks:** An EFSA evaluation concluded that the glycerol concentrations in slushies were a health concern and recommended the setting of maximum glycerol levels. [EFSA FAF Panel 2026](#)
- **Thallium in kale chips:** After an enquiry from an individual with elevated thallium levels, the California Department of Public Health issued a consumer warning for a range of kale-based snacks. [CDPH 19 May 2026](#)

Some other observations

- According to a media article, the University of Gloucestershire will assess the safety of composted dog faeces for growing flowers and vegetables.
- A Brazilian study identified Caribbean ciguatoxins in fish consumed locally, providing further evidence of the geographical expansion of ciguatera poisoning.
- A pre-print article reports low PFAS concentrations in raw milk from vending machines in Switzerland, but the data suggest there are regional contamination hot spots.
- A review describes the emergence of anti-fatigue peptide supplements made from plant- and animal-based foods, noting that each requires a safety assessment.
- An article describes the quality of cocoa products when rotten or diseased fruit are mixed with good quality fruit, which can occur when there is a supply crisis. Further work will explore microbiological and chemical safety issues.
- The trending use of ube, a purple yam from the Philippines, is putting the ube supply under stress. This creates conditions that can weaken food safety and authenticity.
- A laboratory study found that one brand of snortable energy powder damaged human nasal cells, with caffeine being the ingredient causing most of the cellular damage.

Links to:

BBC report by [E. Ashcroft \(3 May 2026\)](#)

Brazil ciguatera study by [Hoff et al.](#)

Swiss PFAS study by [Paravicini et al.](#)

Anti-fatigue peptides review by [Ji et al.](#)

Review of mixed cocoa fruit by [da Silva et al.](#)

Ube media reports by [CNBC](#) and [Food Navigator](#)

Snortable powder study by [Mercier et al.](#)