

When to consider a coordinated approach

A coordinated outbreak investigation should be considered when the investigation and response to the identified potential EU-level foodborne illness outbreak fulfils the following four criteria (listed in [table 1](#)):

- **Involves food (or water):**
 - The illness/pathogen is normally associated with a food/water source; and/or
 - A contamination event is identified in a food/water source.

- **Is international:**
 - There are cases of the same FWD illness identified in several EU or EEA/EFTA countries; and/or
 - The source is known or suspected to be a food product that has been imported from or exported to other EU or EEA/EFTA countries; and/or
 - Similar events in the past resulted in international spread of the disease.

- **Is ongoing or the source not found:**
 - The source is unknown; and/or
 - Cases are still occurring

- **Needs a coordinated approach:**
 - The available resources nationally available for this event are insufficient to detect, investigate or control it; and/or
 - The event has attracted or is likely to attract a high degree of international media or political attention; and/or
 - There are several international agencies involved; and/or
 - The event requires or will benefit from the use of a network to enhance mitigation of the outbreak through collaboration, sharing of information and planning, and coordinating actions and communications.

If all four of the above-mentioned issues are present, a coordinated international response should be considered.

Urgency and impact of the outbreak

The public health impact of the identified food-borne illness outbreak, including the severity and scope, and unexpectedness, may further support the requirement for a coordinated investigation, for example, if any of the following exist (listed in [table 2](#)):

- large numbers of unexplained cases
- rapidly increasing case count
- severe illness or deaths observed among identified cases
- an unusual or particularly pathogenic organism is involved

- a vulnerable population is over-represented among cases
- there is suspicion of an intentional release of a biological agent

Two tables present these categories in the form of checklists:

1. Checklist of considerations for the need of a coordinated international investigation
2. Checklist of considerations for the prioritization of a coordinated international investigation

Outbreak coordination

According to the ECDC *“Guiding Principles to Response to public health threats related to communicable diseases and diseases of unknown origin at EU level”* (v.10.04.06), the coordination of the investigation of an FWD outbreak involving several European countries may be done by the ECDC or by one of the involved countries. This coordination can be conducted by any of the involved Member States if they offer to coordinate (and it is accepted by other affected Member States) or alternately by ECDC, if this is accepted by the affected Member States. The coordination of the actual management of the outbreak is always ensured by the Commission.