



There is No "I" in RRT: Collaborating with Multiple Agencies to Establish Tennessee's Rapid Response Team

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION: Tennessee was awarded RRT funding in September 2023. The TNRRT includes partners from the Tennessee Departments of Health (TDH), Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA), TDH and TDA laboratories, USDA, and FDA.

METHODS: The Core TNRRT is housed within TDH. TDH hired a coordinator in June 2024 to facilitate multi-agency communications and investigations. The Strategic TNRRT was formed by identifying key personnel in each contributing agency that meets biweekly to discuss outbreaks, recalls, and programmatic updates. An in-person TNRRT Kickoff Meeting was hosted in October 2024. The purpose of the meeting was to allow partners to meet one another and to learn about each partner's role in a food emergency.

RESULTS: In 2024, TNRRT participated in over 50 investigations, including 27 multistate clusters and outbreaks. Multiple local and multistate Tennessee outbreaks have included partnerships between TNRRT agencies. One success of TNRRT collaboration was the Diamond Shruumz investigation in June 2024. Due to regulatory ambiguity in Tennessee, several conversations were needed to coordinate case finding and perform recall checks. TNRRT was able to identify 9 cases in this outbreak, and TDA inspectors identified stores selling product beyond those on the FDA distribution list. Ultimately, 21 of 38 facilities on the FDA distribution list had product on the shelves, and TDA inspectors removed 446 units of recalled product.

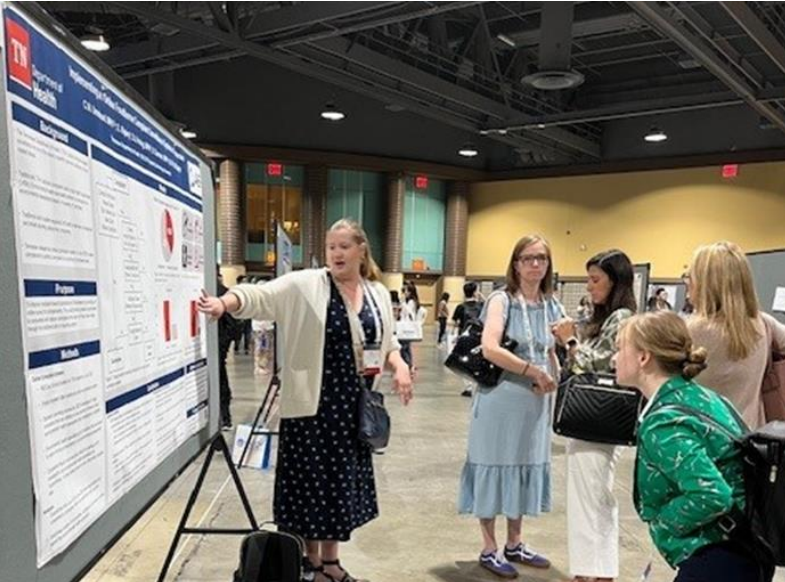
CONCLUSIONS: Establishing TNRRT improved collaboration between multiple Tennessee and federal agencies before and during foodborne outbreak investigations, resulting in solved investigations and additional removed product from the marketplace. Moving forward, TNRRT will focus on building capacity for food safety employees through documentation, training, and reestablishing the TN Food Safety Task Force, while continuing to investigate instances of foodborne illness.

Introduction

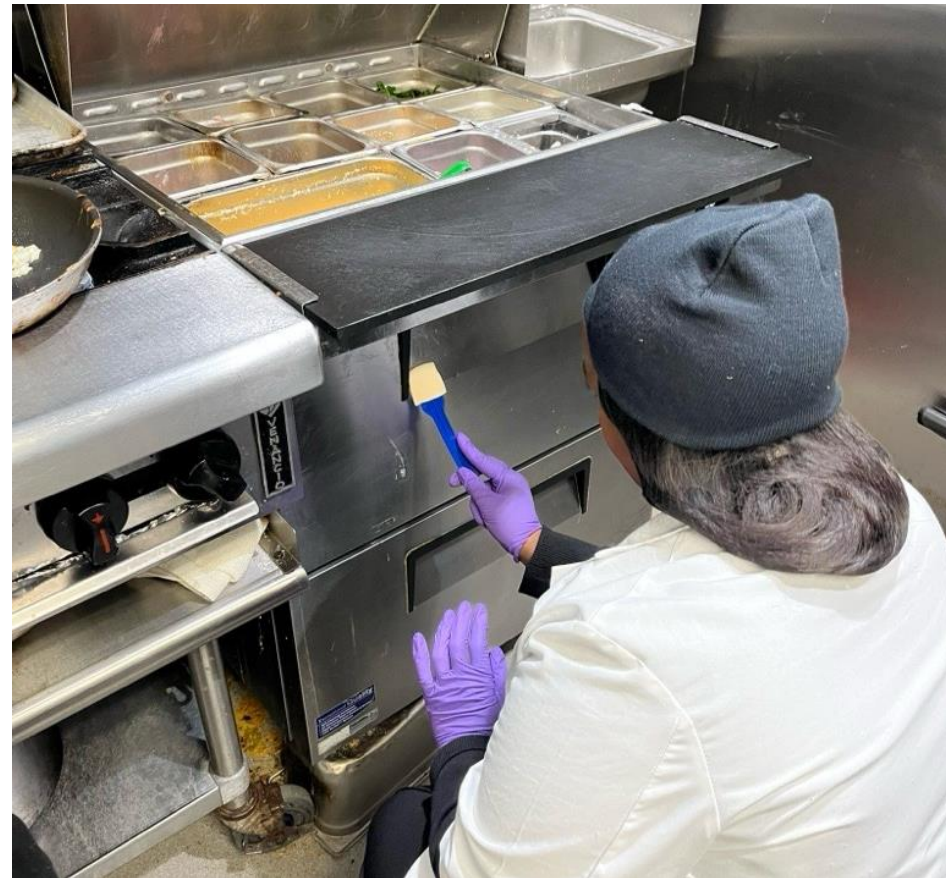
- Awarded funding September 2023
- RRT Coordinator hired June 2024
- Partners from Tennessee and federal agencies
 - Tennessee Department of Health
 - Foodborne and Enteric Diseases
 - Public Health Emergency Preparedness
 - Environmental Health
 - State Public Health Laboratory
 - Tennessee Department of Agriculture
 - Food and Dairy Program
 - Technical Services Laboratory
 - Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
 - United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Methods

- Hiring an RRT Coordinator
 - Claire Umstead joined the team in June 2024
 - Dedicated staff member for documentation and capacity building
- Epi-Ready for RRT in Memphis
 - Sent RRT Coordinator, Environmental Health Specialist, and Training Coordinator
 - Received training from FDA on investigating complex outbreaks with focus on roles of epidemiologists, environmental health specialists, and laboratorians
- Putting a Team Together
 - Used previously known contacts to identify primary and secondary contacts for every partner organization
 - Built out larger contact list using survey shared at Kickoff Meeting
- IAFP 2024
 - Presented on TN Complaint system
 - Met lots of people working in industry!
- Visiting SMarRRT at HAF2East
 - Two TNRRT members met one-on-one with SMarRRT in Baltimore
 - Presented on Tennessee's complaint system and establishing RRT
 - Met representatives from MD, PA, VA , DE, Washington, D.C., FDA
- Kickoff Meeting
 - Invited primary and secondary contacts from RRT agencies
 - Team/Trust-building exercises
 - Agency Overviews
 - Introduction to Complex Outbreaks
- Strategic Meetings
 - Take place biweekly
 - Each agency shares updates
 - Opportunity to ask questions of other agencies who don't regularly meet together
- Environmental Investigation opportunities
 - Outbreaks
 - Food Sampling
 - Environmental Assessments
 - Environmental Sampling
 - Trainings
 - Environmental Assessment
 - Environmental Sampling
- Developing Operational Plan
 - Formal SOPs in development for
 - Complaint triage
 - Recall response



Team building activity during Kickoff Meeting



Results

- The TNRRT played a pivotal role in investigating foodborne outbreaks and recalls in 2024.
- In total, TNRRT participated in over 50 investigations, including 27 multistate clusters and outbreaks.
- A key example of this success was the Diamond Shruumz investigation in June 2024, which showcased the strength of the TNRRT's coordination across multiple state and federal agencies despite challenges in regulatory clarity.
- Case finding was conducted using the National Poison Data System (NPDS), FDA CAERS complaints, ESSENCE surveillance, and medical record abstraction in partnership with CDC, Tennessee Poison Control, local health departments, and healthcare facilities.
 - 9 cases
 - 3 hospitalizations, requiring intubation and ICU admission
 - 5 female (56%), 4 male (44%)
 - Median age: 23 yrs (range: 16-35 yrs)
 - 4 white, non-Hispanic (44%)
 - 1 black, non-Hispanic (11%)
 - 1 Middle Eastern or North African, non-Hispanic (11%)
 - 3 unknown race and ethnicity (33%)
 - 7 consumed a Diamond Shruumz chocolate bar (78%)
 - 7 consumed at least half the bar in a single sitting (78%)
 - 5 had coexposure with another substance (56%)
- Prophet Premium Blends issued a recall of their Diamond Shruumz products on June 27th, 2024.
- TDA completed recall checks of 38 facilities
 - 17 facilities:
 - 114 chocolate bars
 - 79 cones
 - 253 gummies
 - 21 facilities: no product
- Outreach efforts were extensive. 90 certified letters and 57 emailed letters were sent to retailers/distributors to provide recall information. TDH's FoodCORE Team called 30 and emailed 31 individual purchasers of product from the FDA-provided list.

Product Recall



Discussion

- The Diamond Shruumz investigation illustrated the effectiveness of multi-agency collaboration in managing foodborne outbreaks.
- The swift identification and removal of contaminated products, combined with clear and frequent communication, played a key role in minimizing public health risk.
- This investigation underscored the importance of state collaboration; particularly for novel outbreaks. States overcame the lack of guidance at the start of the outbreak due to limited information through knowledge sharing to identify strategies for investigation and response. This collaborative effort displayed the principles that TNRRT and the RRT cooperative agreements operate on.
- Thanks to cooperative work between many states and their RRTs, the evidence provided supported FDA's decision to restrict the use of Amanita muscaria in food products.
- Moving forward, TNRRT will continue to build upon this experience to improve the speed and efficacy of future foodborne illness investigations in Tennessee.
- TNRRT will focus on enhancing food safety capacity, providing targeted training to food safety personnel, and re-establishing the Tennessee Food Safety Task Force to further improve response capabilities.

TNRRT Future Plans

- TNRRT will continue to develop a formal operational plan, including written SOPs for rare and everyday outbreak response capabilities
- Plan full exercise with all TNRRT partners to practice ICS principles and improve communication during real emergencies
- Train other states through an environmental sampling train-the-trainer with AFDO to cross-train and build capacity for Tennesseans and Kentuckians
- Finish 2024-2025 Capability Assessment Tool and develop and improvement plan based on the findings from the assessment
- Continue to collaborate with partners both within the TNRRT and nationally
- Continue working as a team to respond to food emergencies!

Contact Information

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