

1 Article

## 2 Overview of Foodborne Disease Outbreaks in Brazil 3 from 2000 to 2018

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18 **Abstract:** This study aimed to assess the foodborne diseases (FBD) outbreaks reported in Brazil  
19 between 2000 and 2018, based on data from the Brazilian Ministry of Health (official data) and from  
20 the scientific literature. According to official data, 13,163 FBD outbreaks were reported in the  
21 country during this period, involving 247,570 cases and 195 deaths. The largest prevalence of FBD  
22 outbreaks was observed in the Southeast region of Brazil (45.6%). In most outbreaks it was not  
23 possible to determine the food implicated (45.9%) but among those identified, water was the most  
24 frequently associated (12.0%). The etiological agent was not identified in most outbreaks (38.0%),  
25 while *Salmonella* (14.4%) was the most frequently reported, among those identified. Homes were the  
26 main site of FBD occurrence (12.5%). Regarding data obtained from the scientific literature, 57  
27 articles dealing with FBD in the country throughout the same period were selected and analyzed.  
28 Based on these articles, mixed foods were the most prevalent in the outbreaks (31.6%), *Salmonella*  
29 spp. was the pathogen most frequently reported (22.8%) and homes were also the main site of FBD  
30 occurrence (45.6%). Despite under-notification, the records of FBD outbreaks that have occurred in  
31 Brazil in the past recent years show alarming data, requiring attention from health authorities. The  
32 notification of outbreaks is essential to facilitate public health actions.

33 **Keywords:** epidemiological survey; foodborne illnesses; food contamination; food safety; public  
34 health  
35

### 36 1. Introduction

37 Foodborne diseases (FBD) are considered an important and growing public health issue and  
38 represent an important cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide. They are the result of ingestion  
39 of contaminated foods or beverages, mainly by a variety of bacteria, viruses and parasites [1].

40 Common FBD symptoms include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, lack of appetite  
41 and fever. The intensity of these symptoms depends on many factors, such as the pathogen involved,  
42 infectious dose, health conditions of the affected individual, among others [2]. The fact that many  
43 types of FBD trigger similar symptoms hinders the correct diagnosis. In addition to public health  
44 problems, FBD can cause significant economic losses since they may result in incapacity for work,  
45 costs with treatments, hospitalizations and epidemiological investigations, as well as damages  
46 involving tourism and food sales [3,4].

47 The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that FBD affect 48  
48 million people annually, with 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths in that country [1].  
49 Nevertheless, national and international reports take into account that only a fraction of cases are  
50 actually documented, reported to public health authorities and recorded in official FBD statistics [1,5].

51 Although there are several surveillance systems for FBD at the municipal, state and federal levels  
52 in many countries, it is estimated that only a fraction of the FBD outbreaks are reported to the  
53 appropriate authorities, due to the fact that a small proportion of affected individuals seek medical  
54 attention [6,7]. Consequently, the lack of data hinders the assessment of the real dimension of the  
55 problem and the development of control strategies [8].

56 Despite the lack of data on the occurrence of FBD, many studies point to an increase in the  
57 number of cases worldwide. Several factors may result in a higher number of cases, such as  
58 population growth, increased population of susceptible individuals, disorderly urbanization  
59 processes and the need for large-scale production of foods [9,10,11]. According to the World Health  
60 Organization, most cases of FBD could be avoided if preventive measures were taken in place  
61 throughout the food production chain, requiring efforts by governments, the food industry and  
62 consumers [5,12].

63 The present study aimed to map the FBD outbreaks that occurred in Brazil between 2000 and  
64 2018, based on data reported by the Brazilian Ministry of Health and from the scientific literature.  
65 These data are expected to contribute to the knowledge of FBD outbreaks occurring in the country,  
66 as well as to support food safety planning, promotion, prevention and control strategies, aiming to  
67 reduce the risks to the health of the community.

## 68 2. Materials and Methods

69 The present descriptive study consisted in the search, classification and analysis of data from the  
70 Brazilian Ministry of Health (official data) and from scientific articles dealing with FBD outbreaks in  
71 the country from January 2000 to December 2018. Official data were obtained from the Ministry of  
72 Health's website and from the Electronic System of the Citizen Information Service (e-SIC -  
73 <https://esic.cgu.gov.br/sistema/site/index.aspx>).

74 The analysis of the Brazilian scientific articles on FBD outbreaks was carried out in the following  
75 databases: LILACS, SciELO, Scopus, Web of Science, Pubmed and Embase. The articles classified and  
76 selected in this study were those derived from research carried out in Brazil, available for consultation  
77 between June and July 2019. This analysis was performed by searching the databases through the  
78 following keywords in Portuguese: "doenças transmitidas por alimentos", "surtos de doenças",  
79 "investigação de surtos de doenças", "Brasil" and in English: foodborne disease, disease outbreak  
80 and Brazil. The selection was performed by carefully analyzing the titles, abstracts, keywords and  
81 finally by reading the full text in order to define whether or not a publication meets the criterium of  
82 being a FBD outbreak described in Brazil, between the years 2000 and 2018. The official data and  
83 those of selected publication were organized into spreadsheets and classified according to the  
84 number of cases/outbreaks, distribution of FBD outbreaks by region, foods involved in the outbreak,  
85 etiological agents and site of occurrence.

## 86 3. Results

### 87 3.1. Data from the Brazilian Ministry of Health

88 According to data from the Brazilian Ministry of Health, between 2000 and 2018 a total of 13,163  
89 FBD outbreaks were reported to the Department of Health Surveillance, which estimates that  
90 2,429,220 individuals have been exposed, resulting in 247,570 ill individuals and 195 deaths (Table 1).  
91 The highest incidence was recorded in the Southeast and South regions of the country, accounting  
92 for 70.4% of the reported cases. The Northeast region computed 18.2% of the cases, followed by the  
93 Midwest (6.1%) and the North regions (5.3%) (Figure 1). Most of these FBD outbreaks were confirmed  
94 after investigation based on epidemiological survey (22.7%), clinical analyses (13.2%), bromatological  
95 analyses (10.1%) and epidemiological-clinical-bromatological analyses (8.8%) (Table 2).

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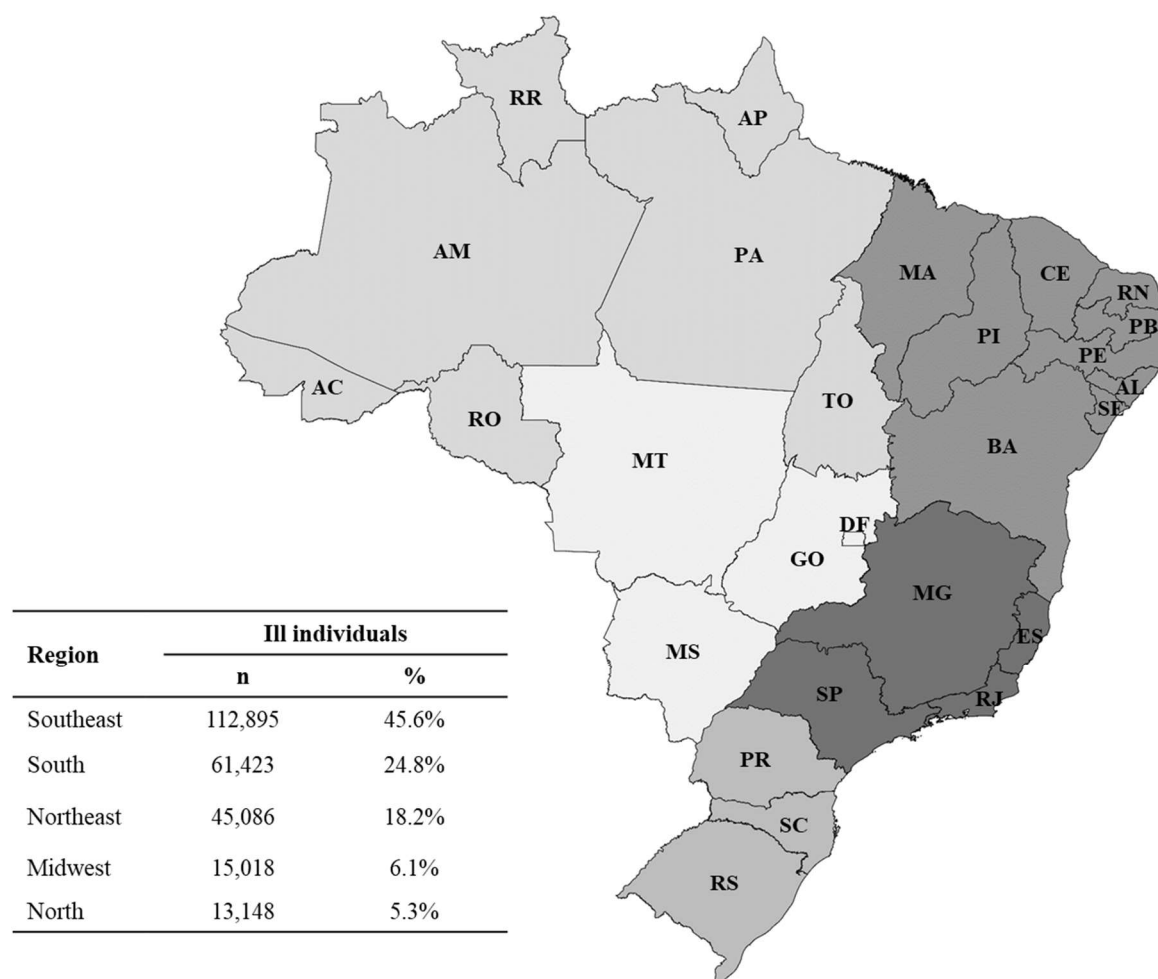
**Table 1.** Data of foodborne disease outbreaks reported in Brazil between 2000 and 2018.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Outbreaks</b>	<b>Exposed individuals</b>	<b>Sick individuals</b>	<b>Dead individuals</b>
2000	545	31,943	9,613	4
2001	897	211,228	15,706	5
2002	823	116,962	12,402	5
2003	620	688,742	17,981	4
2004	645	368,158	21,781	21
2005	923	241,991	17,279	12
2006	577	49,044	10,356	8
2007	683	25,195	11,635	11
2008	641	23,275	8,736	26
2009	594	24,014	9,407	12
2010	498	23,954	8,628	11
2011	795	52,640	17,884	4
2012	863	42,138	14,670	10
2013	861	64,340	17,455	8
2014	886	124,359	15,700	9
2015	673	35,826	10,676	17
2016	538	200,896	9,935	7
2017	598	47,218	9,320	12
2018	503	57,297	8,406	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,163</b>	<b>2,429,220</b>	<b>247,570</b>	<b>195</b>

Source: Brazil, 2016 and Brazil, 2019b.

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100 **Figure 1.** Distribution of ill individuals due to FBD outbreaks by region. Brazil, 2000 to 2018. The  
 101 map was created using an online service (<https://mapchart.net/>). Southeast Region - ES: Espírito  
 102 Santo, MG: Minas Gerais, RJ: Rio de Janeiro, SP: São Paulo; South Region - PR: Paraná, SC: Santa  
 103 Catarina, RS: Rio Grande do Sul; Northeast Region - AL: Alagoas, BA: Bahia, CE: Ceará, MA:  
 104 Maranhão, PB: Paraíba, PE: Pernambuco, PI: Piauí, RN: Rio Grande do Norte, SE: Sergipe; Midwest  
 105 Region - DF: Distrito Federal, GO: Goiás, MT: Mato Grosso, MS: Mato Grosso do Sul; North Region -  
 106 AC: Acre, AM: Amazonas, AP: Amapá, PA: Pará, RO: Rondônia, RR: Roraima, TO: Tocantins.

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108  
109**Table 2.** Confirmatory criteria, foods implicated, etiological agents and sites of foodborne disease occurrence in Brazil between 2000 and 2018.

Component	Individuals	
	n	%
<b>Confirmatory criteria</b>		
Inconclusive	111,914	45.2
Epidemiological survey	56,203	22.7
Clinical analyses	32,693	13.2
Bromatological analyses	24,969	10.1
Epidemiological-clinical-bromatological analyses	21,791	8.8
<b>Foods implicated</b>		
Not identified	113,571	45.9
Water	29,690	12.0
Mixed foods	25,834	10.4
Multiple foods	24,206	9.8
Eggs/egg products	17,075	6.9
Red meats	8,772	3.5
Others*	28,422	11.5
<b>Etiological agents</b>		
Not identified	93,981	38.0
<i>Salmonella spp.</i>	35,743	14.4
Rotavirus	24,434	9.9
<i>Escherichia coli</i>	18,398	7.4
<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	15,724	6.4
<i>Bacillus cereus</i>	8,213	3.3
Inconclusive	8,135	3.3
Norovirus	6,076	2.5
<i>Clostridium perfringens</i>	5,761	2.3
<i>Shigella sonnei</i>	5,035	2.0
Others**	26,070	10.5
<b>Sites of occurrence</b>		
Homes	30,964	12.5
Daycare / school	26,143	10.6
Restaurants / bakeries	22,965	9.3
Not identified	20,305	8.2
Events	18,898	7.6
Hospitals	7,615	3.1
Asylums	1,106	0.4
Scattered sites	119,574	48.3

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Source: Brazil, 2016 and Brazil, 2019b.

111 \*Others: other types of implicated foods accounting for less than 2% each.

112 \*\*Others: other etiological agents accounting for less than 2% each.

113 Of the 13,163 outbreaks reported, it was not possible to determine the food implicated in most  
114 of them (45.9%) (Table 2). Among those identified, water was the most frequently associated vehicle  
115 within these outbreaks (12.0%), followed by mixed foods (10.4%), multiple foods (9.8%) and eggs  
116 (6.9%). When evaluated according to region of occurrence, the Northeast, Southeast and Midwest  
117 regions showed water as the main source of FBD outbreaks. Multiple foods were the most frequently  
118 implicated in the North region, and eggs and egg products in the South region (data not shown).

119 Regarding etiological agents, the pathogen was not identified for most outbreaks (38.0%) (Table  
120 2). Among those identified, *Salmonella* spp. (14.4%), Rotavirus (9.9%) and *Escherichia coli* (7.4%) were  
121 the most frequently reported. Other microorganisms were also mentioned, although in a lower  
122 proportion, such as *Staphylococcus aureus* (6.4%), *Bacillus cereus* (3.3%) and *Clostridium perfringens*  
123 (2.3%). Homes were pointed out in most outbreaks (12.5%), followed by daycare/school (10.6%) and  
124 restaurants/bakeries (9.3%) (Table 2).

### 125 3.2. Data from the scientific literature

126 The analysis of the six databases resulted in the selection of 57 articles that met the purpose of  
127 this study. Regarding the main research topic, 30 (52.6%) articles dealt with a specific outbreak that  
128 occurred at a particular time and location, 18 (31.6%) carried out a study on FBD according to a  
129 specific etiological agent and 9 (15.8%) carried out a study on FBD in a specific region during a certain  
130 time. Only one study on the overall burden of FBD outbreaks occurring in the country was found,  
131 although addressing a shorter period (2007-2017).

132 Mixed foods were the most frequently associated with these reported outbreaks (31.6%),  
133 followed by water (21.1%) (Table 3). Regarding etiology, most of these studies focused on FBD  
134 outbreaks caused by *Salmonella* spp. (22.8%), followed by *Trypanosoma cruzi* (14.0%) and Norovirus  
135 (12.3%). However, in 5.3% of these studies the etiological agent was not identified (Table 3).

136 Most of these studies pointed out homes as the main site of FBD occurrence (45.6%), followed  
137 by restaurants (7.0%), workplaces (7.0%), events (3.5%), hospitals (1.8%), asylums (1.8%) and ships  
138 (1.8%). In 31.6% of these studies the site of occurrence was not identified (Table 3).

139 **Table 3.** Data from the scientific literature on foods implicated, etiological agents and sites of  
140 foodborne disease outbreaks described in Brazil between 2000 and 2018.

Component	Studies	
	n	%
<b>Foods implicated</b>		
Mixed foods	18	31.6
Water	12	21.1
Uninformed	8	14.0
Red meats and poultry	6	10.5
Fish and seafood	4	7.0
Acai/acai juice	4	7.0
Eggs/egg products	2	3.5
Vegetables	2	3.5
Sugarcane juice	1	1.8
<b>Etiological agents</b>		
<i>Salmonella</i> spp.	13	22.8



Trypanosoma cruzi	8	14.0
Norovirus	7	12.3
Virus da Hepatite A	4	7.0
Fish Toxin	4	7.0
Rotavirus	3	5.3
<i>Clostridium botulinum</i>	3	5.3
Uninformed	3	5.3
<i>Bacillus cereus</i>	3	5.3
Others*	9	15.8
<b>Sites of occurrence</b>		
Residences	26	45.6
Uninformed	18	31.6
Restaurants	4	7.0
Workplaces	4	7.0
Events	2	3.5
Hospitals	1	1.8
Asylums	1	1.8
Ships	1	1.8

\*Others: other etiological agents accounting for less than 4% each.

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#### 142 4. Discussion

143 Foodborne diseases represent one of the most common and important public health issues  
 144 worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, 23 million people in the Europe Union (EU)  
 145 become ill and 5,000 die every year due to FBD [13]. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
 146 estimates that FBD affect 48 million people annually, with 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths  
 147 in the United States of America (USA) [1].

148 In Brazil, little is known about the epidemiological profile of FBD, since only a small number of  
 149 cases are notified to food inspection and health agencies. The number of individuals that became ill  
 150 (n=247,570) and died (n=195) due to FBD reported in the country during the period covered in this  
 151 study (2000-2018) is dramatically lower than that annually estimated for the EU and the USA.  
 152 Delayed notification, lack of clinical and/or food sample collection, inadequate laboratory tests and  
 153 even a difficulty in contacting involved individuals generate gaps in obtaining more detailed and  
 154 reliable data on the FBD outbreaks [14]. Consequently, the absence of the real dimension on the  
 155 occurrence of these FBD limits the understanding of their importance for public health [9,15].

156 The present study showed that the states located in the Southeast and South regions of the  
 157 country have a higher proportion of reported outbreaks when compared to the states located in other  
 158 regions. This is directly related to the number of cities and towns that have the Foodborne Diseases  
 159 Epidemiological Surveillance System (VE-DTA) well implemented. In addition, most of the Brazilian  
 160 population (42.1%) lives in the Southeast region of the country [16,17,18].

161 Most of the studies and reports on the FBD outbreaks registered in Brazil pointed to water,  
 162 multiple/mixed foods and eggs/egg products as the main sources of foodborne pathogens. Mixed  
 163 foods are characterized as multi-ingredient preparations, which are more susceptible to  
 164 contamination due intense manipulation [9]. Water has also a significant role on the occurrence of  
 165 FBD outbreaks and its contamination is directly related to the precariousness of water treatment. In  
 166 Brazil, drinking water must comply with the Ministry of Health guidelines, which sets absence of  
 167 total coliforms and *Escherichia coli* per 100 mL of water [19]. However, 16.7% of the population in the  
 168 country (about 35 million people) do not have access to treated water [20].

169 Bacteria were the most common cause of the FBD outbreaks reported in the country, being  
170 *Salmonella* spp. the most frequently involved pathogen. Contamination of foods by this bacterium  
171 may occur along the production chain. Failures during food handling, including poor personal and  
172 environmental hygiene, storage at inappropriate temperatures and cross contamination may increase  
173 the risk of contamination [21,22]. The main foods involved in the FBD outbreaks caused by this  
174 bacterium are raw eggs, egg products, meat products and vegetables [23]. A study conducted by  
175 Callejón et al. [24] concluded that *Salmonella* was the leading cause (22.7%) of FBD outbreaks that  
176 occurred in several states of the USA during 2004 and 2012. Kozak et al. [25] studied FBD outbreaks  
177 in Canada from 2001 to 2009 and found that *Salmonella* was the main pathogen involved (50%).

178 Homes were the main site of FBD occurrence, followed by restaurants and bakeries. According  
179 to the European Food Safety Authority, 95% of cases of FBD came from small outbreaks originating  
180 in households [26]. A study conducted by Ting-ting [27] in China showed that most deaths due to  
181 FBD outbreaks occurred in homes between 2002 and 2011. In another study conducted in China, Li  
182 et al. [28] have shown that schools (42.7%) and homes (32.6%) were the main sites of FBD outbreaks.  
183 These findings highlight the importance of investment in sanitary conditions and education for the  
184 population. Day care centers and schools represented the second largest site of FBD occurrence. These  
185 places usually concentrate high-risk groups, i.e. young children [29]. Restaurants and bakeries also  
186 present an important role on the FBD occurrence.

187 Only one out of the 57 articles selected and analyzed in this study addressed the overall burden  
188 of FBD outbreaks reported in Brazil: a review conducted by Draeger et al. [9]. Although their study  
189 covered a shorter period (2007-2017) than the present work, there were similarities between the  
190 results: the largest prevalence of FBD outbreaks was observed in the Southeast region of the country  
191 (41.3%); in most cases it was not possible to determine the implicated food (57.4%), but among those  
192 identified, mixed foods and water were the most prevalent (9.1% and 6.6%, respectively); etiology  
193 was not identified in most cases (38.0%) but among those identified *Salmonella* spp. was the most  
194 frequent (22.1%) and homes were the main site of FBD occurrence (38.3%).

195 Overall, the FBD mapping provides subsidies for the development of political, educational and  
196 legislative measures. It is a challenge for FBD surveillance teams to create measures that standardize  
197 reporting across all Brazilian regions, reducing differences between surveillance systems among  
198 different counties and minimizing the time between reporting the outbreak and starting  
199 investigations. However, it is crucial that epidemiological reports become more frequent and reliable  
200 for appropriate preventive and monitoring actions to be able to avoid the occurrence of new  
201 outbreaks.

## 202 5. Conclusions

203 Based on data obtained in this study, the records of FBD outbreaks reported in Brazil  
204 underrepresent the reality of the problem in the country. However, they still show alarming data,  
205 which require attention from health authorities. Although the number of cases reported in the  
206 country is lower than that reported in other parts of the world, such as the USA and the European  
207 Union, it is known that this difference may be due to underreporting. Hence, efforts to improve the  
208 Brazilian surveillance systems are necessary, as the notification of outbreaks is essential to facilitate  
209 public health actions.

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