

Dangerous disregard for the right to water



Sarah Rice/Stringer

On this year's Human Rights Day, Dec 10, current events in the USA suggest that a key human right is being dangerously disregarded. Access to water is an indispensable part of life, health, and dignity. In 2010, the UN General Assembly recognised the human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation; the US has yet to agree and ratify this view.

On Dec 10 in Flint, Michigan, a city of 100 000 mostly impoverished African Americans, residents will have been without clean water for an incredible 443 days. In 2014, the city, under state control at the time due to a financial emergency, disconnected from their usual water supply and began sourcing water from a local river, hoping to save US\$12 million. What they may have saved in dollars they have reaped in illness and death by failing to ensure the new water supply was properly treated and monitored. *Escherichia coli* and hazardous levels of lead were subsequently found, and a spike in cases of shigellosis and Legionnaires disease, including 12 deaths, ensued. The state of emergency declared in October, 2015, followed months of government dismissal of community

concerns about water contamination. The damage to public health and trust continue; Michigan is currently fighting a court order that requires it to provide bottled water to residents.

A failure to recognise the right to water also looms in Standing Rock, North Dakota, where the battle over a proposed oil pipeline through indigenous territory will likely continue to brew. For the Sioux Nation, the pipeline would disrupt ancestral land and water sources. For proponents of the pipeline, the threat of oil spillage into water supply for drinking and agriculture appear ancillary to corporate and private interests.

Disregarding the importance of water as a human right has health consequences. But it also allows for the view that water is a commodity rather than a public good, which is similarly dangerous. Privatising water supplies shifts the power from people to corporations, and cannot ensure safe, clean, accessible, and affordable water supply. Recognising the right to water can. It is a right worth fighting for. ■ [The Lancet](#)

For more on recovery efforts in Flint see [World Report Lancet](#) 2016; **387**: 1499–1500
For more on lead and Legionnaires disease see [Newsdesk Lancet Infect Dis](#) 2016; **16**: 298–99

Building the evidence base for safety in food allergy



Peter Gable/Getty

The global prevalence of food allergies has steadily increased over the past two decades, according to a new report, *Finding a Path to Safety in Food Allergy*, released by the National Academies of Sciences on Nov 30. The comprehensive report assessed and defined the current landscape of food allergy in the USA, and outlined six courses of action—including expanding research, improving public policies, and increasing education of health-care providers—aimed at improving the quality of life of people with food allergies.

Importantly, the report calls for reliance on evidence-based approaches for the diagnosis and prevention of food allergies. Currently, there are no simple and definitive tests for food allergies, with the accepted gold standard being the oral food challenge, which can be high risk for some patients, and is expensive. Accurate diagnoses of suspected food allergies must rely on evidence-based, standardised methods, and a patient needs to be referred to a specialist to appropriately assess and manage the allergy.

The report emphasises that more research is fundamental to preventing and managing food allergies. Adding to the evidence base, in an Article published online in *The Lancet* on Dec 8, 2016, Osamu Natsume and colleagues report the findings of the PETIT trial, showing effective reduction of hen's egg allergy in high-risk infants aged 4–5 months by feeding them small quantities of cooked egg in a stepwise approach. Although the findings of PETIT are promising, further research in larger and more diverse populations is required to demonstrate generalisability and safety of this preventive strategy, adds Graham Roberts in an accompanying Comment.

Physician education and further research are the mainstays of improving prevention and management of food allergies, not only in the USA but worldwide. Development of effective public health policies and prevention strategies, as well as engaging other stakeholders, such as food manufacturers, school leaders, consumers, and health-care providers, is crucial to understanding and preventing the rising global burden of food allergies. ■ [The Lancet](#)

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[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31661-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31661-0)

For *Finding a Path to Food Safety* see <http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2016/finding-a-path-to-safety-in-food-allergy.aspx>