The Committee's work in 2021

In this guide

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Proposed working group on botulinum toxin-producing *Clostridia* and vacuum packaging and associated processes

5. In April 2021, ACMSF considered and accepted the FSA’s proposal for a subgroup to be setup to discuss the risk assessment issues that are relevant for inclusion in a review of chilled and ambient vacuum-packaged (VP) and modified-atmosphere-packaged (MAP) foods. This was in response to the publication of the ACMSF report on non-proteolytic *Clostridium botulinum* and VP/MAP foods (published in January 2020) and the discussion the Committee had in October 2020 on the report’s conclusions and recommendations particularly the areas identified for review in the report.

6. A group was setup as requested and had their first meeting in June 2021. The group was named Ad Hoc Group on toxin-producing Clostridia in food. The full Committee received an update on the group's activities at the October 2021 plenary meeting. The group's agreed terms of reference are:

- Review the risk posed by botulinum toxin- producing *Clostridia* in foods stored at ≤8°C that support growth or toxin production

- A preliminary assessment of the risk posed by botulinum toxin-producing *Clostridia* in food designed to be stored at ambient temperature that support growth or toxin production

- Where appropriate consider other risk related evidence relevant to toxin-producing *Clostridia* during the lifetime of the group

7. Members welcomed the group's revised terms of reference.

8. The group was commended for the rapid advice it provided the FSA on the concern the food industry had on the issue of shortage of gaseous carbon dioxide used in packaging of food. The advice focussed on the use of CO2 atmospheres to restrict the growth of aerobic spoilage bacteria, and to slow the growth of many moulds and yeasts (and other post process contamination that causes food spoilage), in large sectors of fresh and cooked foods.

Literature review on botulism in cattle, sheep and goats: 2006 to 2021

9. The Committee at the October 2019 plenary meeting considered a systematic literature review on botulism in cattle, sheep and goats produced by the FSA's Microbiological Risk Assessment Team. Risk managers in the FSA, asked the Microbiological Risk Assessment team to revisit this topic to identify any new information since the Committee's 2006 and 2009 reports. The resulting literature reviews were presented to the committee at the October 2019 plenary meeting (ACM/1311) and their comments were reflected in a revised paper ACM/1352, which members considered at the April 2021 plenary meeting. Members made additional comments on paper (ACM/1352) and a revised paper (ACM/1367 together with its Annex[1]) was presented to the Committee at the October 2021 plenary meeting. The revised literature review (ACM/1367 Annex 1) was approved subject to a number of corrections that were highlighted.

10. Paper ACM/1367 underlined that there have been a few recent papers published on the transmission of botulism from animals to food. It was noted that ACM/1367 continues to support the safety recommendations contained in the 2006 and 2009 and ACMSF report.

[1] Available from the secretariat

Update on recommendations from the ACMSF Botulism in Cattle, Sheep and Goats reports

11. The Committee asked for this update to be provided following their consideration of the literature review on Botulism in Cattle, Sheep and Goats at the April 2021 plenary meeting. Following discussion, the committee asked the secretariat to convey the following points to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (meeting minutes para 7.9 refers):

- Recommendation 8.7 (Samples collected during clinical investigations should be archived to assist with the development of further assay systems). Members felt that Animal and Plant Health Agency's (APHA) response "samples are collected from clinical investigation as they do not get many cases in a year and the samples are only kept for a very limited time and so there is no archive of samples" was unacceptable. As the committee recommended samples to be archived, if this is not possible, there should be reasons explaining why this is not done.
- On the issue of guidance (recommendations 8.10 and 8.11 refers), it was observed that the majority of the available information is on archived websites. It was pointed out that if the FSA is taking responsibility for this subject there should be a place on the FSA website which informs stakeholders where to go if they want advice on botulism. It was felt guidance/messages on the use and disposal of poultry litter and messages to broiler farmers with respect to biosecurity (recommendations 8.10 and 8.11) should be in prominent locations on the appropriate government departments' websites for easy access for interested parties.
- Response to recommendation 8.15 was queried. This response stated that there is little evidence of other toxins causing botulism in the UK and there is a watching brief on botulism. The committee asked how the current regime that doesn't require reporting works in practice. It was felt that if an outbreak occurs it doesn't look like identification of toxin happens

automatically if there's a reasonable assumption that it's caused by poultry litter, in which case how much evidence is being collected on the other types of toxin that are causing botulism? The monitoring system was flagged to be deficient in terms of not following up some of the small number of outbreaks that are reported.

Campylobacter source attribution (Oxford study)

12. Professors Noel McCarthy and Martin Maiden gave a presentation (in closed session) on the above study (Enhanced molecular surveillance of *Campylobacter* in Sentinel Sites in the UK). This FSA funded project was launched in 2015 to investigate human *Campylobacter* infections in rural and urban populations and provide a model which could link *Campylobacter* strains to principal food and animal sources, thus mapping the sources of human infection. Data was also sought to aid evaluation of the effectiveness of interventions to tackle *Campylobacter* in the food chain.

13. The principal aim of this study was to estimate the contributions of the main sources of human *Campylobacter* infection and to identify any changes in this over time. An extension to the project, in 2018, focussed on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in study isolates and older archived isolates. The aim of this additional work was to analyse the emergence of AMR that is now present among human *Campylobacter* isolates and to describe and compare AMR in recent food animal isolates.

14. The study report is available on the FSA website.

Food Standard Agency’s Foodborne Disease Policy Framework

15. The FSA’s Foodborne Disease Policy Framework was presented to the committee in closed session. The committee was informed that the new foodborne disease policy framework sets out in one place all of the Foodborne Disease Control team’s policy priorities and approach to foodborne disease control. Previously, a key focus of the Foodborne Disease Control team has been on *Campylobacter* which meant a lot of resource was focused on this pathogen. It was noted that the direction of the framework will be overseen by the Foodborne Disease Policy Framework steering group, which is chaired by foodborne disease

policy team and comprises a wide membership across the FSA, FSS and FSA Northern Ireland.

16. The Committee was asked to comment if the approach used in the framework is an appropriate way to tackle foodborne disease and the proposed draft foodborne disease model.

17. Members discussed and commented on the framework (see paragraph 42).

Epidemiology of Foodborne Infections Group

18. The Committee received two updates on the activities of the Epidemiology of Foodborne Infections Group in 2021. EFIG met in January and June 2021.

19. The update ACMSF received in April 2021 was a summary of trends in animal and human infection, *Salmonella* National Control Programme (NCP) results from 2019 and 2020 (January – September 2020) and a summary of foodborne outbreaks in 2020. A caveat attached to the update pointed out that 2020 was an abnormal reporting year due to various aspects with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee made a number of comments on the update which include:

- The need to revise the format used to present EFIG updates. It was felt that the report should bring out key messages/issues the committee should be providing advice on. A request was also made for a summary of the updates.
- The need to clearly understand the data in the time series covered in the report as this is a period of significant change in consumer behaviour in relation to food.

20. The Committee noted that the secretariat was working with UKHSA and APHA to respond to the specific queries that have been raised on the human and animal infections data that members are requesting for change in the way they are presented. April 2021 meeting minutes refers.

21. The update ACMSF received in October covered three areas:

- Update on the outcome of the 9 June 2021 EFIG meeting
- Response to comments made by members on EFIG reports
- UKHSA's presentation on the Use of Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) for gastrointestinal pathogen routine surveillance and outbreak detection and investigation (the talk covered the following areas: How UKHSA delivers its role, Detecting and characterising outbreaks with WGS, WGS capabilities,

Challenges and opportunities with integration of WGS into routine surveillance, Focus in future, Summary and experience to date)

22. Committee's discussion on the above is available in the meeting minutes. Paragraph 8.3 highlights the members' comments on the outcome of the June 2021 meeting (comments on the summary of trends in animal and human infection and summary of foodborne outbreaks). At paragraph 8.5 is the committee's remarks to the response provided by EFIG secretariat on the Committee's queries on EFIG reports. Although ACMSF broadly welcomed the secretariat's response, a number of suggestions were made which include:

- The need to include simple statistical analysis of data to EFIG reports as it was highlighted that this enables interpretation of results with less difficulty.
- Having short summaries at the front of the report highlighting the points in the report that are of note to EFIG for ACMSF to see.
- Having links to the incident reports or references within the EFIG report that would lead to how issues have been tackled. The committee would then be able to follow progress on particular incidents or outbreaks.

23. Members' comments on the UKHSA's presentation on the use of WGS for gastrointestinal pathogen routine surveillance and outbreak detection and investigation are at paragraph 8.7 of the meeting minutes. The committee acknowledged that the presentation was excellent as it clearly explained the advantages of WGS, together with its limitations, and what is needed to fully exploit these techniques both within the country and at the international level. It was noted that to understand how pathogens mutate or arise in other countries will require each country to share their data.

Food and You 2 – Wave 1

24. The Committee was presented with findings from Food and You 2 waves one and two. Wave 1 of Food and You 2 fieldwork was conducted by Ipsos MORI and took place between July and October 2020. The total achieved sample size was 9,319 (5,140 in England, 2,100 in Wales and 2,079 in Northern Ireland), with a response rate of 30%. Wave 2 of Food and You 2 fieldwork was conducted by Ipsos MORI and took place between November 2020 and January 2021. The total achieved sample size was 5,900 (2,968 in England, 1,366 in Wales and 1,566 in Northern Ireland), a response rate of 28%.

25. The presentation covered the following areas: Research background, Waves 1 and 2 findings and how are the findings used.

26. Key findings on food safety covered:

- Cleanliness
- Cooking and reheating food
- Chilling and defrosting food
- Cross-contamination

27. Members noted how the survey findings are used such as helping the FSA monitor progress against the FSA strategic outcomes and support the FSA's annual and quarterly reporting, including the joint FSA and FSS report on Food Standards, informing policy decision making, and identifying key or emerging issues where further research may be required (e.g., further analysis on ethnic minorities and food insecurity) and Inform content of public awareness campaigns.

28. The committee discussed the survey findings and had comments for the FSA to consider (paragraph 9.6 of the meeting minutes refers).

29.The survey report is available on the FSA's website.

Update on Horizon Scanning Workshop

30.The Committee received a progress report in closed session at the April plenary meeting in relation to their 2020 horizon scanning workshop. The Committee made a number of recommendations and requests for information at the workshop that included an update of Covid-19 related issues, an update on post-EU transition issues, the UK-EU Trade and co-operation agreement, cleaning and disinfection and the FSA's comments on the issue of *Salmonella* Enteritidis and Lion code eggs.

31. Members appreciated the update highlighting that it was a good review that accurately captured the committee's discussion at the workshop.