

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

UPDATE ON VEROCYTOTOXIN-PRODUCING *ESCHERICHIA COLI* O157

1. At the committee's meeting in June 2004 a request was made for an update on Verocytotoxin-producing *E.coli* (VTEC). Since the publication of the committee's VTEC report in 1995 2 key reports on VTEC have been published in the UK looking at various aspects of these organisms in the food chain. The Pennington group report on the central Scotland outbreak (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w4/pgr-00.htm>) was published in 1997 and the report of the *E.coli* task force was published in 2001 (<http://www.food.gov.uk/scotland/pressreleases/2001/jul/blueprintforkillerbug>). The Government has issued responses to these reports highlighting where action has been taken or will be taken to address recommendations. An update on progress in implementing the key areas of the *E.coli* Task Force report (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2004/08/16113836>) was published in August 2004.

Laboratory reports of VTEC O157

2. Table 1 shows the number of laboratory-confirmed reports of VTEC O157 human infections in the UK between 2000 and 2003. The data shown is for confirmed infections not thought to have been acquired abroad. This data represents the majority of the laboratory reports of VTEC O157. The number of laboratory reports for the UK as whole has fallen each year although there is variation between the countries with reductions being most marked in England and Wales between 2000 and 2002 and in Scotland between 2002 and 2003. The provisional number of reports for Northern Ireland in 2003 was the same as in 2000.

Table 1. Laboratory-confirmed reports of VTEC O157 human infections in the UK not thought to have been acquired abroad: 2000-2003.

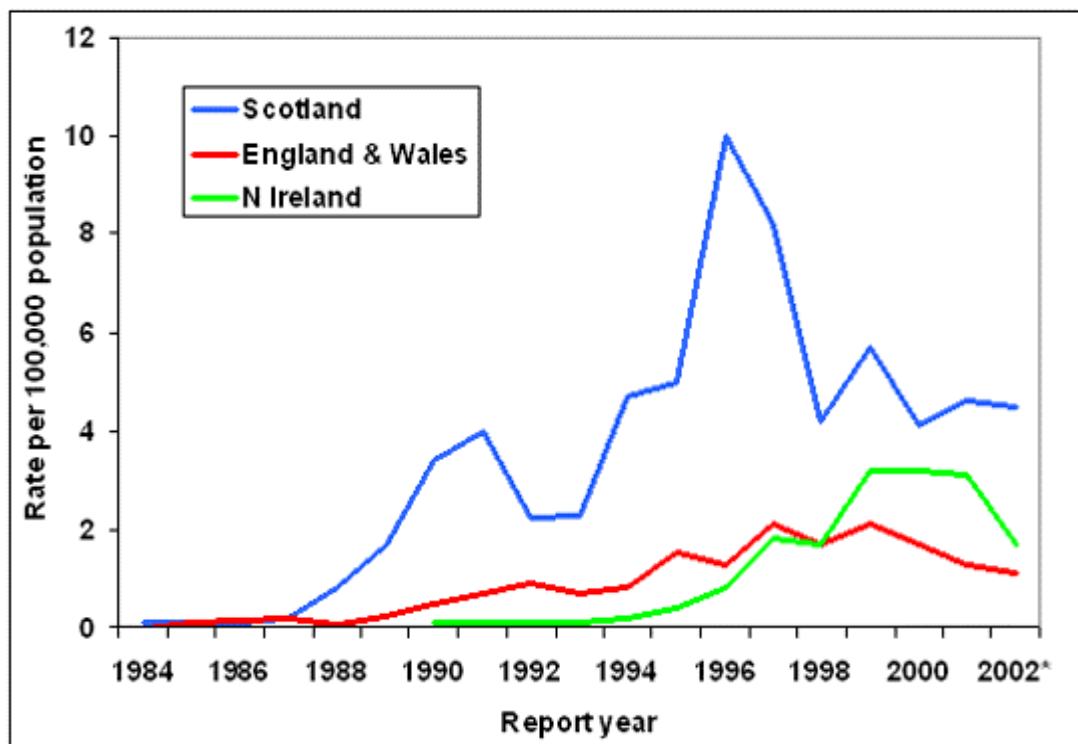
Year	UK	England & Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
2000	1035	790	196	49
2001	932	693	200	39
2002	818	595	196	27
2003*	775	595	131	49

* Figures for 2003 are provisional.

3. Figure 1 shows the trend in rates per 100,000 population of VTEC O157 infections in humans in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The rate in Scotland has remained consistently higher than in

Northern Ireland or England and Wales for reasons that have not yet been established.

Figure 1. Rates per 100,000 population of laboratory-confirmed VTEC O157 human infections in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland 1984-2002.



Source: Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health; * Data for 2002 remain provisional

Data sources: Health Protection Agency, CDSC Northern Ireland and the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health.

Research on VTEC

4. A significant amount of publicly-funded research on VTEC has been undertaken since the committee's report in 1995. The Microbiological Safety of Food Funders Group (MSFFG) is a cross-representational body involving public bodies who fund microbiological research in the areas of food safety. Membership includes officials from the Food Standards Agency (FSA), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Department of Health (DH), and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).

5. In September 2001 the MSFFG published a report reviewing research on VTEC (<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/verocytotoxin.pdf>). This covered research up to 1999 and a more recent report (October 2004) covers 1999 to 2003 (http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/msffg_vtec.PDF). The FSA will be holding a review of its VTEC research program in January 2005 and committee members will be invited to attend.

**Secretariat
November 2004**