

ACM/767

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

DISCUSSION PAPER

***E. coli* O157 Update**

The Food Standards Agency Wales have prepared the attached briefing note to update Members on the recent outbreaks of *E. coli* O157 in South Wales.

**Secretariat
November 2005**

***E.coli* O157 Outbreak, South Wales**

On 16th September 2005 an outbreak of *E.coli* O157 was declared in South Wales.

E.coli O157 is a food poisoning organism which is found naturally in the gut of animals such as cattle and sheep. Raw meat can become infected with the bacteria via contact with intestinal content. *E.coli* O157 can be transmitted in foods, and can also be acquired by person to person spread, as well as from direct contact with farm animals or environments contaminated with animal faeces.

The symptoms of *E.coli* O157 food poisoning include diarrhoea, often with blood, stomach cramps, headache, nausea and sickness. Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome may develop in some cases. This affects the kidneys and is typically fatal in 1-2% of cases.

To date there have been 160 cases identified as probably linked to the outbreak and 111 have been microbiologically confirmed. Cases are mainly children attending schools in a number of local authorities (LAs) in South Wales.

Following the declaration of the outbreak several meetings of the Outbreak Control Team (OCT) have taken place. The OCT membership includes representatives from the affected LAs, National Public Health Service and the FSA.

Initially the OCT investigated possible causes of the infection including foods consumed by the cases. A licensed butcher was identified as supplying cooked meats to all of the affected schools and the OCT requested that the FSA consider issuing a Food Alert for Action to ensure the prompt removal of all such cooked meats from the food chain. This was done and the Agency worked very closely with local authorities to ensure that all potential customers of the cooked meat supplier were identified and contacted.

Whilst the rate of notification of new cases has fallen it is still being monitored by the OCT. Investigations into the cause of the outbreak are ongoing and may lead to legal proceedings. Consequently information that can be released is necessarily restricted.

FSA Wales 9 November 2005