

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD**

**CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER'S STRATEGY : GETTING AHEAD OF THE  
CURVE**

Attached for the information of Members is a copy of the letter sent by the Chairman to the Food Standards Agency conveying the Committee's concerns about the way the Public Health Laboratory Service's microbiological safety functions will be accommodated within the structure of the Health Protection Agency.

**Secretariat  
May 2002**

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## **Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food**

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### **CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER'S STRATEGY : GETTING AHEAD OF THE CURVE**

1. At the ACMSF's meeting on 21 March, Members expressed concern about how the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS)'s microbiological food safety functions will be accommodated within the structure of the new Health Protection Agency (HPA). I thought I should draw these concerns to your attention so that they can be reflected, as appropriate, in whatever representations the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is making to the Department of Health (DH) about the CMO's strategy.
2. As you know, the PHLS plays a vitally important role in monitoring foodborne disease and in carrying out epidemiological investigation of the origins and spread of such disease. This becomes more and more important with wider sourcing of foods, changes in eating habits, and developments in food preparation methods. The evidential and trend data generated by the PHLS often form an essential component of the risk assessments which the ACMSF carries out. If these monitoring and epidemiological functions are not to be transferred to the HPA, or if they are transferred but there is a significant diminution in the level of activity, this could have a very serious impact on the ability to tackle foodborne gastrointestinal illness effectively.
3. There is also the contribution made by reference laboratories to combating foodborne disease. As you know, the ACMSF has consistently supported the establishment and maintenance of reference laboratory facilities. The investigation of foodborne illness would be greatly enhanced if detection and typing methods were available across clinical, veterinary and food isolates. The PHLS has been a

leading player in the search for common methodologies and this capability must be transferred to the HPA.

4. ACMSF members were also concerned about the potential loss of the services provided by PHLS laboratories in respect of sample testing in support of local authority food surveillance programmes. The laboratories are also an integral part of the food law enforcement process and in helping handle the central and local response to food hazards. We cannot afford for these functions to disappear with the setting up of the HPA.
5. It is the full integration of PHLS microbiological and epidemiological functions into a cohesive whole which offers a unique service to the FSA and DH. This clearly needs to be enshrined in any new arrangements. Anything you can do to register our concerns with DH and help ensure that these vital services are transferred to the HPA will be greatly appreciated.

**Professor Douglas L Georgala**  
**Chairman**  
**Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food**