

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD**Summary of the 7th meeting of the *Ad Hoc* group on Foodborne
Viral Infections held on 20 January 2012****1. Introduction**

At this meeting the Group gave consideration to a proposed molecular method that could potentially detect the infectivity and infectious dose of norovirus from food and environmental samples. Members received an overview of the multi-Agency, cross disciplinary Human Animal Infection and Risks Surveillance (HAIRS) group which identifies and provides Government Agencies with advice on new and emerging zoonoses. The group were also presented with information on the current surveillance performed for foodborne disease in the UK along with an update on VITAL, a European food monitoring programme.

2. Measuring Infectivity and Infectious Dose

The Group received a presentation on a Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Link funded project showing the development of a molecular approach for predicting the loss of infectivity in noroviruses. The research aimed to determine the efficacy of thermal inactivation and disinfection processes against norovirus using a quantitative Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) technique. Results from the method were set against those obtained from traditional plaque assays to demonstrate the suitability of the method. Members discussed the practicality of the method and gave consideration to the difficulty of identifying intact but not infectious viruses.

3. Emerging Virus Risks

The Group were presented with an overview of the HAIRS group and their work and approach to identify and provide advice on new and emerging zoonoses. HAIRS is chaired by the HPA, consists of experts from the Health Protection Agency (HPA), Food Standards Agency (FSA), Department of Health, Defra, Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Public Health Wales, Health Protection Scotland, Scottish Government, Public Health Agency Northern Ireland and the National Expert Panel on New and Emerging Infections (NEPNEI). The Group were informed of the process of risk assessment used in terms of hazard identification, risk assessment, risk management and risk communication. HAIRS was highlighted as a successful group in creating a good working relationship between government bodies.

4. Surveillance for Foodborne Viruses

The HPA presented information on surveillance for enteric viruses that might be of importance to foodborne infection such as norovirus. The three main strands of surveillance currently performed were described along with the data available from these studies. The strengths and weaknesses of current surveillance strategies

were reviewed including issues with not being able to identify outbreaks given the lack of patient histories included in reports. The current surveillance undertaken by government departments was also discussed.

5. Update on the Integrated Monitoring and Control of Foodborne Viruses in European Food Supply Chains (VITAL)

An update on the VITAL project was presented. The group were informed that the study, which would shortly come to an end, involved 14 institutes across 11 European Countries. The aim of the project was to use advanced methods of virus detection at multiple points of the food supply chain to investigate contamination. The research would gather data on virus contamination through the monitoring of supply chains for the presence of indicator viruses of human and animal origin. It is expected that the final report of the project will be published later in 2012.

**Secretariat
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