

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

DISCUSSION PAPER

Q fever risk to human health from the consumption of contaminated unpasteurised milk and milk products

1. Q fever is a zoonotic widespread disease caused by the bacterium *Coxiella burnetii* and is present in cattle, sheep and goats. In most cases clinical illness is not seen, but occasional large outbreaks or clinical cases of Q fever are reported in animals. It is an emerging disease that can cause considerable morbidity and serious long-term complications in humans. The main route of transmission to humans is via the inhalation of aerosols from the parturient (birth) products of infected animals. It is known that meat, milk and milk products can be contaminated, however, the link to clinical disease in humans is unclear.
2. Pasteurisation is effective in destroying *Coxiella burnetii*. There is however currently a lack of evidence on which to base a robust assessment of the risks from consumption of contaminated unpasteurised milk and milk products.
3. The FSA has commissioned a project to assess the Q fever risk to human health from the consumption of contaminated unpasteurised milk and milk products. The work is being carried out by the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA).
4. The project is due to finish at the end of July 2013. The work completed to date is being presented to ACMSF at this stage so any comments can be taken on board before the project is completed.
5. Three outputs from the project are attached:
 - A risk profile for *C. burnetii* in unpasteurised milk and milk products (ACM/1106a).
 - Risk pathways for unpasteurised milk and milk products and data requirements for a risk assessment (ACM/1106b).
 - A draft exposure assessment of the probability of exposure to *C. burnetii* due to the consumption of unpasteurised cows' milk (ACM/1106c).

Please note that these reports are marked IN CONFIDENCE and are for Members' Use Only

6. AHVLA will present the work undertaken on the project to date including some initial conclusions from the work.

7. Members are invited to ask questions and to comment on:

- The evidence that Q fever can be transmitted by unpasteurised milk and milk products.
- The data gaps identified in the risk pathway document, in particular the most significant gaps to address in terms of assisting risk assessment.
- The exposure assessment approach taken.
- Any other approach that would help in assessing the level of risk.

**Secretariat
June 2013**