

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

INFORMATION PAPER

CHANGE IN FSA ADVICE ON BOTULISM IN SHEEP AND GOATS

The attached paper updates Members on action taken by the FSA to implement the recommendations in the ACMSF's report on Botulism in Sheep and Goats (ACM/910) that in the absence of other clinical signs there should be no requirement to restrict milk or meat from healthy animals from farms where there have been suspected cases of botulism in sheep and goats.

The Agency is developing a communication strategy in conjunction with the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra), Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) DARD NI and others to inform stakeholders of the change in the Agency's advice.

**Secretariat
March 2009**

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

Change in FSA Advice on Botulism in Sheep and Goats

Issue

1. There has been a recent amendment to the FSA's advice on the management of outbreaks of suspected botulism in sheep and goats following recommendations in the ACMSF's report on Botulism in Sheep and Goats (ACM/910).

Background

2. Prior to publication of the Committee's report, the Agency's policy when managing cases of suspected botulism in sheep and goats was to request that the farmer agrees to a voluntary restriction order on the movement of livestock and on the entry of meat and milk from the affected flock into the food chain. These restrictions applied for a period of 14 days from the onset of the last clinical case or 17 days from the removal of the suspected source of botulism and applied to both affected and healthy animals within the flock.

3. An ad-hoc group of the ACMSF was convened in 2007 to consider the potential risk to human health from food chain issues linked to botulism or suspected botulism in sheep and goats, particularly in relation to the spreading of poultry litter on agricultural land. Based on a thorough review of the scientific literature their report concluded that the current voluntary restrictions on meat and milk from clinically affected sheep and goats appear to be appropriate and such foods should continue to be withheld from the food chain due to concern that this may pose a risk to consumers.

4. However, the report also concluded that voluntary restrictions applied to unaffected animals could be considered to be over-precautionary based on current scientific evidence. This was mainly because the botulinum toxin types identified in animals (C and D) have rarely been associated with disease in humans. In addition, there is little evidence to suggest that any human cases of botulism from meat and milk consumption have occurred. The report therefore recommended that, in the absence of other signs, there should be no requirement to restrict entry into the food chain of milk or meat from healthy animals from farms where there have been clinically suspected cases of botulism in sheep or goats.

5. The draft ACMSF report and recommendations were the subject of a three month consultation with stakeholders and other interested parties. No objections were received on the recommendations to relax restrictions on meat and milk from healthy sheep and goats from farms where cases of botulism are suspected. The finalised report was endorsed by correspondence in December 2008 and has been published on the Agency's website at:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/botulisminsheepgoats.pdf>

6. The FSA is implementing the change to its advice and will no longer request voluntary restrictions for healthy sheep and goats from farms where cases of botulism are suspected. However, this will need to be reviewed if new evidence emerges that the botulinum toxin types that affect humans (i.e. A, B and E) are causing outbreaks in sheep or goats. The FSA will still be informed of cases of suspected botulism in these animals as there may be additional issues for the FSA to consider to ensure that the food chain is protected.

7. This change will bring the Agency's advice for botulism in sheep and goats into line with that for botulism in cattle. Voluntary restrictions for healthy cattle from farms where there are cases of suspected botulism have not been requested by the Agency since December 2006 following recommendations by the ACMSF.

<http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2006/dec/botulismcattle>

8. The Agency is developing a communication strategy in conjunction with Defra, VLA and DARD NI to inform stakeholders of the change in the Agency's advice on botulism in sheep and goats. This is likely to be similar to the communication strategy used to inform stakeholders of the change to the advice regarding botulism in cattle. It is likely to involve a letter to the consultation list for the ACMSF's botulism in sheep and goats report and articles in the Veterinary Record, VLA newsletter, an item on the FSA's website and notification to the farming press. It is anticipated that this will be disseminated in early April.

9. There is some evidence to suggest that access to litter from deep litter broiler houses is a factor in the occurrence of disease in recent outbreaks of suspected botulism in sheep and goats. We would expect litter containing carcass material to be especially high risk source material. In some cases the litter had been spread on land on which animals were grazing or on adjacent fields, in others animals gained access to a stack of stored litter. The Agency's communication strategy will include links guidelines provided by Defra regarding the use of poultry litter.

10. Other recommendations in the Committee's Botulism in Sheep and Goats report will be considered by the Agency in Summer 2009.

Action

11. Members are asked to note the implementation of ACMSF's recommendation to amend FSA advice on management of outbreaks of suspected botulism in sheep and goats, as set out in paragraphs 6 – 9.