

Report published on Wales E coli outbreak

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the last decade, jumping from 361 cases in 1991 to over 1,000 cases a year in recent years. Around 15% of cattle are now



thought to carry it in their gut. The strain first appeared in Britain in the 1980s and is technically known as Verocytotoxin-producing E coli, or VTEC. Fewer than 100 of the tiny E coli organisms can cause illness. In the worst recorded E coli outbreak, 20 people died in Scotland after eating contaminated cooked meats from a butchers shop in Wishaw, Strathclyde.

E coli symptoms can range from mild diarrhoea to abdominal cramps and blood in the stools. Some patients also suffer from a complication, hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), which kills red blood cells and can cause kidney failure. Children under five are particularly vulnerable to HUS. About 5 to 10% of them progress to this stage. In severe cases, it can cause permanent

kidney damage. Young children are particularly vulnerable because they cannot tolerate much fluid and blood loss. The elderly and people with damaged immune systems are also more at risk from the infection.

In his report the Chief Medical Officer made recommendations to the Food Standards Agency, local authorities, the National Public Health Service for Wales, the Wales Centre for Health and the Welsh Assembly Government. Of potential interest to food business operators are recommendations to the FSA to consider whether additional



guidance on handling of raw and cooked meats should be issued to food businesses, and also to consider reviewing their advice to local authorities on inspection frequencies.

To read the full report visit www.cmo.wales.gov.uk/content/publications/reports/e-coli-e.pdf

Firth's Focus

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The tragic death of 5 year old Mason Jones last October during the Wales E coli outbreak (see page 2) reminds us all of how serious the consequences can be when food safety goes wrong. Fortunately fatalities from food poisoning are relatively rare, but with around 900,000 cases reported every year it has an enormous impact on public health and the economy. This has been one of the major factors driving the current changes in food law. So as you're working through the Safer Food Better Business pack during the coming months remember that there are always sound reasons behind new legislation.

As ever, we hope you find this issue of *FoodWise* useful.

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