



Briefing 11/29 June 2011

# 'E. Coli Update

To: All UK catering contacts

## Key issues

The recent E. Coli outbreak in Germany is unlikely to pose a significant risk to UK residents, although continued press coverage will undoubtedly raise anxiety amongst parents.

Whilst the source of the outbreak is currently unknown, it is worth restating the need for thorough washing of fruit and vegetables. Stressing the need to regularly wash hands by pupils will mitigate any secondary infection, should the outbreak spread.

In the event of a wider contamination, a move to cooked or peeled vegetables should be considered. Demand for leafy vegetables on menus should be monitored for any adverse downturn

## 1. Overview

The recent outbreak of E. Coli in Germany has so far claimed the lives of 13 people, through the two related causes of haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS) and bloody diarrhoea (VTEC or EHEC infection, caused by *E. coli* O104). 470 people have been infected with HUS and over 1,000 with diarrhoea. The Health protection Agency has identified identified seven people in the UK who may be associated with the outbreak, all of whom have recently travelled to or from Germany.

The exact source of the contamination has not been determined although is thought to be carried on leafy salads and vegetables, including cucumbers.

The main source of the VTEC O157 strain in the UK is cattle, therefore making the disease a zoonosis, however secondary infections are also acquired, by person-to-person spread by direct contact (faecal-oral). **This is particularly important in households, nurseries, primary schools and residential care institutions.** The incubation period generally ranges from 2 to 14 days, with a median of 3 to 4 days

Typical symptoms are similar to those for gastroenteritis including diarrhoea with or without vomiting, abdominal cramps and fever. Sometimes there is some blood mixed in with the diarrhoea. In most cases, symptoms last a few days and disappear within a week without the need for medicines.

## **2. Effect on Caterers**

The main effect on Local Authority caterers is likely to be a significant reduction in demand for leafy salads and vegetables if the outbreak continues and further UK cases are discovered. As with earlier food 'scares' e.g. salmonella in eggs, the public reaction can be disproportionate to the level of risk and caution persist well after the 'threat' has diminished.

Should the level of outbreak increase over the forthcoming week, catering officers should determine the implications of alternative menus and replacement options, should the need arise.

In some limited cases, the use of leaflets to parent should be considered, to allay fears by providing accurate information and a positive synopsis of the food safety record of the catering provider.

## **3. Further information**

Updates and further information may be found at:

- Health Protection Agency website [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)
- Food Standards Agency [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)
- Health & Safety Executive [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

The information provided within the briefing is gleaned from several sources and APSE makes no claim as to the accuracy of the medical advice contained here. Professional medical and/or legal advice should be sought without reliance on material within this briefing.

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