

Food Borne Disease – FSA Board Meeting Update 20.03.2024

The paper shared (see here: [Foodborne Disease Policy Overview | Food Standards Agency](#)) provided an update of the 3 main areas of work focus, which were discussed:

- **Horizon scan** to identify threats and opportunities. Actions to the Listeria risks of cold smoked fish to vulnerable consumers was mentioned as positive work.
- **Continuous improvement**, which includes a range of controls (e.g. whole genome sequencing) and guidance. It was recognised that food safety after purchase is an important factor, so it's important for the FSA to look at guidance for consumer storage and consumption, including purchases by for those who may be vulnerable e.g. in hospitals. The FSA/FSS mentioned working with the NHS, DHSC etc. so advice can be targeted.
- **Thresholds**, to monitor foodborne disease with further targeted action if needed. The 4 major pathogens were mentioned – campylobacter, salmonella, Ecoli 0157 and listeria and actions being in place if thresholds fall outside of the normal levels. Due to advances in science and changes occurring, the thresholds are being reviewed. The FSA will be working with the HSA, and they hope to have a paper in due course.
 - On a separate note: I've been asked if I can have a call to discuss campylobacter following our withdrawal. I will attend to listen and advise things we've previously shared like managing in individual supplier management programs. I can keep you posted on anything.

Salmonella was specifically discussed due to media reports on an increase in hospitalised cases. But it was shared that there has actually been a reduction in the gastro cases leading to hospitalisation, but the proportion to particular pathogens has gone up. Reports may not be an indicative change of overall disease (e.g. population with more elderly).

Lastly, guidance was commented on and not everyone having a risk may know about it, thus should warnings be on labelling? The FSA shared that health warnings have been considered before, risks vary, and that consumer choice shouldn't be made harder. Where raw drinking milk is used there are specific warnings to be used and we know as retailers that we have labelling in place for specific products with warnings for vulnerable consumers (pregnant, weak immune system).

Unpasteurised cheeses were specifically mentioned, due to the recent issues (see below that was given as an update in today's Micro WG), and how warnings for products on a cheese board on a train may not say unpasteurised cheese. The chair concluded that they need to ensure the system protects consumers as best as possible. A comment was made that not all unpasteurised cheeses have the same risks, e.g. parmesan cheese which has a higher salt content and less risk.

Due to the specific mention and the update from the Micro WG on LA focus, unpasteurised cheeses are one to consider and monitor if the FSA have any comments on this in the future.

Sam (FSA) Update in Micro WG 20.03.2024 – STEC 0145 - Mrs Kirkhams Unpasteurised Cheese:

‘Update on reporting of non-O157 STEC infections and an outbreak of Shiga toxin-producing E. coli (STEC) O145 in the UK, February 2024’

Link to publication from HSA on 7th March was shared:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-report-volume-18-2024/hpr-volume-18-issue-2-news-7-march-2024>

The investigation isn't yet closed but stable now (as per the last Micro WG information). As part of the incident response and investigations, the FSA identified non-compliance areas that caused food safety concern. This identified improvements in LAs. A letter will be shared imminently to highlight the non-compliances so suitable action can be taken for compliance.

Main concerns were that a number of businesses supplying the cheeses were not registered, shelf life by the manufacturer not adhered to (extended), instructions not being followed in terms of 'once opened, use within', and non-compliance of legal requirement to identify product is a non-pasteurised cheese.

Regulation 853/2004 has labelling requirement of wording for products manufactured by raw milk. Some cases had a non-compliance due to alternative wording. **ACTION for BRC members: Businesses advised to sense check unpasteurised cheese (made with raw milk and not heat treated) has the correct wording***. LA's will be asked to check retailer stores who sell unpasteurised cheese that they are compliant.

Consideration is also given to foodservice. There has been a delay to the letter due to this, and compliance will be clarified for foodservice to ensure sufficient information required for consumers to make an informed choice is in place. Vulnerable groups are of most concern.

** CHAPTER IV: LABELLING*

1. In addition to the requirements of Directive 2000/13/EC, except in the cases envisaged in Article 13(4) and (5) of that Directive, labelling must clearly show:

(a)

in the case of raw milk intended for direct human consumption, the words 'raw milk';

(b)

in the case of products made with raw milk, the manufacturing process for which does not include any heat treatment or any physical or chemical treatment, the words 'made with raw milk';

Note the above applies to only cheeses with raw milk that have had no heat treatment at all.