

Babergh Foodwise



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Everything you needed to know about

E coli O157

E coli O157 (full name Escherichia coli O157) is a relatively rare cause of stomach upsets in England and Wales, but it can cause very severe illness or even be fatal, particularly in the young and elderly. Many strains of E coli are found naturally in the gut of humans and animals and are harmless, but some strains form toxins (poisons) which cause symptoms from mild diarrhoea to severe inflammation of the gut. E coli O157 is the most important toxin-producing strain associated with human illness.

Where does it come from?

The main reservoir for E coli O157 is the intestines of healthy cattle (although it has been found in sheep and other animals). Meat can become contaminated via contact with contents of the intestines during slaughter. Consequently beef (in particular beef burgers) and unpasteurised milk have often been associated with human illness. However any food can be a vehicle for E coli O157 if cross-contamination has occurred ▶

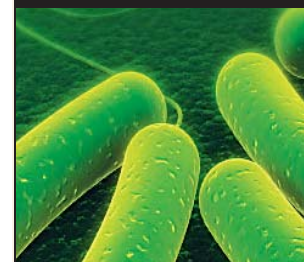
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BABERGH FOODWISE

How does it cause food poisoning?

E coli O157 may be present in foods such as beefburgers and survive if the food is not cooked properly. Alternatively bacteria may contaminate any ready to eat food. Unfortunately the infective dose (ie the number of bacteria needed to cause illness) for E coli O157 is very low, probably less than one hundred bacteria. This is a tiny number compared to the infective dose for Salmonella for example, which is normally in the region of one million bacteria. This means that it is very easily for cross-contamination to occur if raw and ready to eat foods are not adequately separated or if cleaning and disinfection regimes are not thorough.

It is also important to remember that because this bacterium is found in animals, infections can arise from direct contact with animals. Outbreaks and isolated cases have been linked with handling of animals, particularly cattle, and therefore there are risks associated with visitors, especially children, to farm centres.

How can we prevent E coli O157 infections?

The good news is that E coli O157 is easily destroyed by cooking. Burgers and sausages should be cut into to make sure that there are no 'pink bits' remaining. With larger items such as rolled joints of beef it is best to check the internal temperature with a sanitised temperature probe. A core temperature of 70oC for 2 minutes is sufficient to kill E coli O157.

The other important control measure is preventing cross contamination. Raw and ready to eat foods should ideally be stored and handled in different areas. If raw meats are stored in the same refrigerator as ready to eat foods then the raw meat should be at the bottom so that it can't drip onto foods below.

It's best to have different areas of the kitchen for preparation of raw and ready to eat foods. But if that's not possible it is essential that these operations are carried out at different times and the work surface is cleaned and sanitised in between jobs. If you use a sanitising chemical which has to be diluted before use, make sure

Firth's Focus

Welcome to the Autumn 2008 edition of FoodWise



Welcome to Issue 12 of Foodwise, our food safety newsletter for businesses. Our main article in this issue looks at the food poisoning bug E coli O157 which in recent years has caused major outbreaks, including fatalities, in Scotland and Wales. You can find out to prevent your business from becoming the source of an outbreak and read about two businesses, including one in Suffolk, which got things wrong.

The Food and Safety Regulation team have recently changed the way that they carry out food hygiene inspections, in accordance with guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency. The idea is to spend less time with businesses who are complying with the law, and more time with businesses that are not! Find out how this might affect you on page 4.

And talking of guidance, Foodwise includes some information which will be of interest to you if your businesses carries out vacuum-packing of foods, or if you need some help training your staff in the Safer Food Better Business system.

To give us feedback on Foodwise, to request future copies by email or for any food safety queries contact the Food and Safety Regulation team on 01473 825703 or food.safety@babergh.gov.uk.

you follow the manufacturer's instructions for diluting it to the correct concentration. If it's too weak, or too strong, it won't work! Bear in mind too that the sanitising chemical is likely to need a minimum contact time to do its job. Again, check the instructions. Finally, be wary of equipment which may act as vehicles for contamination, such as knives, chopping boards and cloths. Separate equipment should be used for raw and ready to eat foods wherever possible, otherwise careful cleaning and sanitising is critical. Disposable cloths are safest, but if you choose to use reusable cloths they must be boil washed. And

don't forget that unwashed hands can also spread contamination!

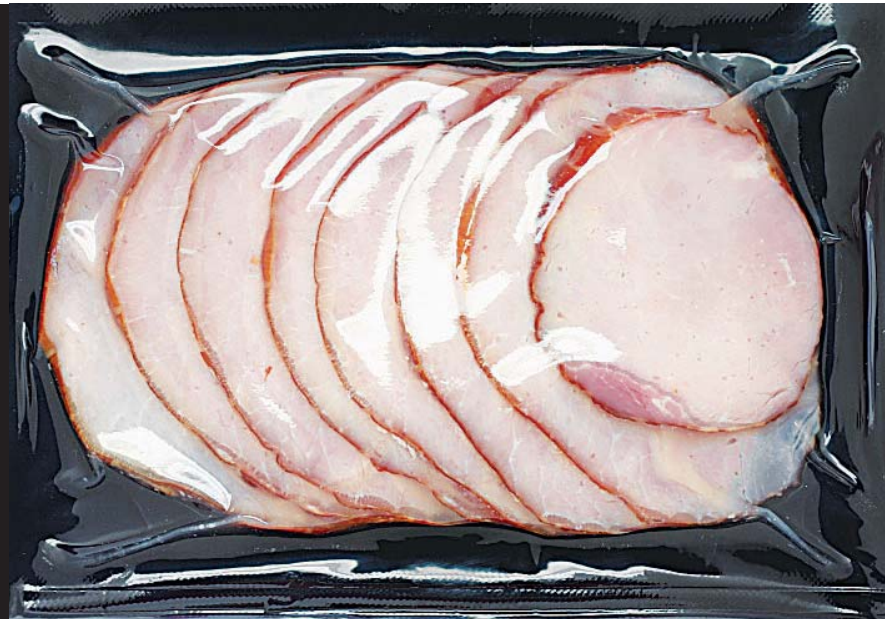
Check list for E coli O157 control:

- Cook food thoroughly.
- Keep raw and ready to eat foods apart.
- Clean and sanitise work surfaces and equipment carefully, especially after handling raw meat.
- Ensure that you make your sanitising chemical to the correct concentration and give it time to work
- Use disposable cloths or ensure cloths are boil washed.
- Wash hands carefully, particularly after handling raw meat.

(Vacuum) Pack it in!

The Food Standards Agency has recently published guidance for small businesses on vacuum/modified atmosphere packaging. If you vacuum-pack chilled foods and wish to set a shelf life of more than 10 days you need to read this guidance to ensure that you are packing food safely.

To download a copy of the guidance visit the Food Standards Agency website at



<http://www.food.gov.uk/food-industry/guidancenotes/foodguid/vpguide>. Or if you do not have internet access and

would like us to send you a copy, contact the Food and Safety Regulation team on 01473 825890 or food.safety@babergh.gov.uk

Case studies:

1 A healthy 42 year old female Babergh resident was admitted to hospital with severe abdominal pain and profuse bloody diarrhoea which was diagnosed as an E coli O157 infection. She remained in hospital for five days and for a while doctors feared that her bowel was so badly damaged that part may have to be removed. Thankfully this was not the case in the end and she was expected to make a full, though slow, recovery. The cause of her infection could not be determined.

2 Six young males were diagnosed with E coli O157 infection in early July. Two were hospitalised. Interviews of the cases revealed that they had all eaten food from a particular takeaway in Suffolk. Officers visited and found raw burgers being stored above prepared lettuce in one of the fridges. The takeaway had been warned previously about inadequate separation of raw and ready to eat foods. A prosecution is pending.

3 During September and October 2005 159 people in South Wales were diagnosed with E coli O157. The majority of cases were children and tragically five year old Mason Jones died from his illness. The vehicle of infection was found to be cooked meats which had been distributed to schools and residential homes by Tudor and Son of Bridgend. EHOs found various failings at the premises including inadequate separation of raw and ready to eat foods and staff with diarrhoea being allowed to continue handling food. Tudor was jailed for 12 months and the outbreak has been the subject of a public enquiry.





An inspector calls - but at different times!

Since June this year the Food and Safety Regulation team have been working in accordance with a new Food Safety Act Code of Practice, which sets out how we should carry out inspections and enforcement in food premises.

A major change in the new Code is the option to carry out a less detailed inspection of businesses which are 'broadly compliant' with food hygiene legislation. This means, if you currently receive a visit from an officer every eighteen months or two years, you may find that next time we visit we spend less time at your premises than we have done previously.

Typically, the officer will check that you are maintaining your Food Safety Management System and then carry out a brief physical check of the premises. The idea of this approach is to spend less time with compliant businesses and therefore free up more time to spend with businesses that are less compliant.

If you have any questions about this new approach contact the Food and Safety Regulation team on 01473 825890 or food.safety@babergh.gov.uk



Food on film!

All new copies of the Safer Food Better Business pack now contain a free DVD. The DVD, with voiceovers in 16 different languages and video scenes of realistic situations in small catering and retail businesses provides additional support to businesses that are implementing and training staff in SFBB.

The DVD, which is aimed at managers, food handlers, trainers and local authorities, can be ordered free of charge from FSA Publications. To request a copy of the DVD call the 0845 606 0667. Alternatively you can view the DVD content online at <http://www.sfbtraining.co.uk/>