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**Safer food, better business**

## **Report examines increase in listeriosis in UK**

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The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) has, after public consultation, published a report on increased incidence of listeriosis in the UK.

Following reports of an increase in cases of listeria, predominantly in the over-60s age group, the Agency sought advice from the ACMSF, an independent scientific advisory committee, on the reasons for this change. Similar increases were also reported in other European countries, including France and Germany.

This ACMSF report considered four hypotheses to try to establish the cause of the change in epidemiology in the over-60s age group. These were that:

- the rise in cases of listeriosis in compromised people over 60 years of age is something associated with improved case recognition
- the pathogen *listeria.monocytogenes*, has become more virulent and 'new' strains are better able to cause bacteraemia
- the population predominantly affected by the recent increase has become more susceptible to infection with listeria
- levels of exposure have increased

This work was carried out within a risk framework to assess hazard characterisation, identification and exposure. Aspects of risk management were also considered, including legislative limits, food industry controls and consumer advice.


The recommendations in the report include:

- pan-European surveillance, epidemiological and microbiological investigations
- studies to investigate differences in virulence of listeria
- maintaining targeted active surveillance for listeria spp. in foods is important to inform control of this organism
- information on food consumption patterns of the over 60s (including vulnerable groups) is needed to inform approaches to risk management
- communicating general food safety advice to the over 60s, as well as to those involved in their care and preparation of their food
- the Agency's independent Social Science Research Committee should consider food storage and handling practices of older people
- any future advice to industry and enforcement authorities should reiterate the importance of temperature and shelf life control, hygiene/cleaning and formulation of food in preventing contamination or limiting the growth of listeria.monocytogenes in foods

Printed copies of the report can be obtained by emailing: [acmsf@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:acmsf@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk), quoting document reference FSA/1439/0709, or can be downloaded from the link below.

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