

17 October 2018

Oherwydd natur frys yr hysbysiad hwn, mae'r llythyr yma ar gael yn Saesneg yn unig

Due to the urgent nature of this notice, this letter is available in English only.

Dear Sir / Madam

You will wish to be aware of an ongoing *Salmonella typhimurium* outbreak that has affected 276 people as of 11th October 2018. Although the source of the outbreak has not been confirmed, the majority of cases have been linked to the consumption of meat from affected livestock (sheep and lamb).

In light of this outbreak, we are urging establishments that produce and handle red meat to check their established hygiene procedures to guarantee that unsafe food is not placed on the market and where they identify food safety problems, to alert the Official Veterinarian, (OV), for the Food Standards Agency.

Slaughterhouse operators deciding to accept animals onto the slaughterhouse premises after evaluating the relevant FCI should apply food safety management procedures based on the HACCP principles to ensure that the food they place on the market is safe. Compliance with this will enable meat to enter the market.

The areas to focus on to aid prevention of further cases are:

Avoiding Cross-contamination

Livestock reported on Food Chain Investigations (FCI) to be *Salmonella* infected (or suspected to be infected) must be slaughtered at the end of the day followed by increased

level of cleaning and disinfection in the slaughterhouse. While not a legal requirement, it is advisable that environmental swabs are taken to verify the effectiveness of cleaning and disinfection. Regulation (EC) No 852/2004, Annex II, Chapter IX Point 3 states that at all stages of production, processing and distribution, food is to be protected against any contamination likely to render the food unfit for human consumption, injurious to health or contaminated in such a way that it would be unreasonable to expect it to be consumed in that state.

Animal Plant Health Agency (APHA) are applying livestock movement restrictions to farms that are identified to have the outbreak strain on the farm and/or in the livestock on the farm. Additional measures will be communicated from the FSA to slaughterhouses that receive potentially infected animals in advance. This will enable enhanced measures to be applied to control the presence of the strain of salmonella associated with the outbreak to facilitate the production of meat that is safe to eat and to prevent further outbreak cases.

Where red meat establishments are approved for the slaughter of different animal species (or for the handling of carcasses of farmed game and wild game), HACCP- based procedures are necessary to ensure that food safety hazards, notably microbiological cross-contamination during dressing and at other subsequent stages of production while the carcasses/meat remain within the control of the FBO.

Food Hygiene

FBOs must implement robust measures in line with HACCP requirements to ensure fitness for human consumption of all food produced on site and take into account its intended use. FBOs must apply Good Hygiene Practices (GHPs) to ensure the food placed on the market is safe.

Temperature Controls

The cold chain must be maintained. The meat from animals potentially infected with the outbreak strain should be chilled to ensure a temperature throughout the meat of no more

than 3°C for offal and 7°C for other red meat, prior to dispatch from the slaughterhouse. Additional measures that are applied to establishments that receive Salmonella infected meat (or suspected to be infected) prevent the meat from these animals to be transported for the production of specific products or partially chilled. Your OV will discuss these with you and consider if you are able to demonstrate that you have effective systems in place to accept affected batches of livestock in advance of receipt at your establishment.

In many cases, temperature control may be regarded as a prerequisite requirement. However, there are specific temperature requirements for raw and processed meat in Regulation (EC) No 853/2004. As a result, operators of approved meat establishments need to ensure that the food safety hazards, notably the growth of bacteria through inadequate temperature control, are minimised.

Traceability

Incident investigations encountered challenges on obtaining traceability information from businesses, tracing backwards and forward the food chain. Many businesses were unable to provide traceability information in a timely manner which hampers investigations and poses increased risk to consumers.

Please ensure that you're record systems are in place and effective to enable information to be provided to the competent authority when requested.

Regulation EC (No) 853/2004 Annex II Section I Point A4 requires that FBOs must, in accordance with Article 18 of Regulation 178/2002, have in place systems and procedures to identify FBOs from whom they have received and to whom they have delivered products of animal origin.

Food Chain Information (FCI)

Primary producers (Farmers) should be reminded that food chain information is required for all animals submitted for slaughter. Primary producers must report **any** concerns as to the status of the holding of provenance or regional animal health status, including the animal's

'health status' and the occurrence of diseases that may affect the safety of meat on the FCI form. Primary producers should also include the results of samples taken as part of the framework for the monitoring and control of zoonoses and residues if they are relevant to public health. Production data should also be reported where this might indicate the presence of disease.

The FCI must be evaluated and reviewed by the FBO in particular in regard to Salmonella and the Official Veterinarians (OV's) may require additional measures to ensure protection of the meat. Any actions that are taken by FBOs should focus upon exemplary hygiene and additional controls should be applied if there are greater risks than usual. FBOs should also consider that animals may be asymptomatic but still carriers of salmonella and that salmonella may be zoonotic and therefore consider the health and safety of people in their employment to prevent occupational exposure.

Background

The outbreak began over a year ago, incident investigations were commenced in August 2017 and concluded 30 November 2017 when outbreak control was achieved.

There was a period of a latent phase from December to end of May 2018. Since June this year there has been a re-emergence. Initially it appeared that the source was a sheep farm in England and a number of measures were taken by the farmer involved, slaughterhouses affected, Public Health England (PHE), Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), Local Authority and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) with the aim of curtailing the outbreak. As a result, case numbers reduced significantly. However, in the past few weeks the number of cases has risen again at a higher rate than previously seen. We now believe there is at least one other farm with the outbreak strain and we are receiving indications that further sources of the contamination exist.

Since 2014, PHE has been routinely undertaking whole genome sequencing (WGS) on all human Salmonella isolates. This allows PHE to detect, in real time, closely genetically related Salmonella strains in a way that was not possible with previous laboratory testing

methodologies. The increased resolution provided by this typing method enables the identification of human disease cases which are likely linked to a common source of contamination in the food chain. As a result, more Salmonella outbreaks are being detected. When investigations are then carried out, using WGS enables identification of instances where contamination of a specific Salmonella strain may be persisting at different stages along the food chain where the implementation of control measures has not been fully effective in eradicating Salmonella contamination.

Next Steps

We recognise that relevant slaughterhouses are undertaking deep cleans however sheep may be presented as silent carriers causing reinfection of these plants.

In line with current legislation the FSA can, as the Competent Authority, determine the conditions under which such animals may be slaughtered. These conditions have the aim of minimising cross contamination of other animals and the meat of other animals. Regulation (EC) No 854/2004, Annex I, Section II, Chapter III, (7) refers.

Slaughterhouse operators deciding to accept animals onto the slaughterhouse premises after evaluating the relevant FCI must apply food safety management procedures based on the HACCP principles to ensure that the food they place on the market is safe.

The conditions that the FSA has determined are outlined in a document that is available to OV's, will they be discussed and shared with each FSA approved establishment that is identified to receive livestock and/or meat from affected batches where additional controls are identified to be necessary.

Slaughterhouse operators choosing to implement alternative controls must ensure that those have at least equivalent effect.

To assist with safeguard of the food chain we ask for:

1. Your vigilance towards FCI's and make the OV aware of any diseases declared or signs of sickness in animals

2. Undertake the measures detailed above
3. Where there is evidence of Salmonella contamination - undertake sampling, consider carcass and environmental sampling
4. Positive results sampling undertaken by the FBO's, (own food safety management controls or regulatory compliance), are notified to the OV and FSA using the usual notification of an incident, (outlined in the Food Law Code of Practice)
5. Samples held at laboratories from the food business testing that have tested positive for salmonella are sent for sequencing, to ascertain whether it is the same strain as the outbreak. If challenges exist to achieve this, please communicate them to the FSA's OV and food incidents team at: foodincidents@food.gov.uk

For points 4 and 5 above, the occurrence of positive salmonella results. Routine incident procedures will apply. No provision exists for the prevention of meat from entering the food chain, on notification of positive results, risk management advice will be sought and provided. In exceptional circumstances, where additional risks are identified, e.g. poor compliance with hygiene standards **and** detection of the outbreak strain of Salmonella, a risk assessment may also be necessary, which may lead to additional control measures being necessary.

Please be aware that the FSA may be carrying out verification sampling of the environment where slaughterhouses have been notified that there is evidence of possible contamination, this might be on an announced or unannounced basis during the outbreak control period.

We are alerting local authorities to these messages, so they can follow up in food business they have control over that handle red meat and livestock. We also plan to issue public health messages shortly about handling and meat at home safely.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact incidentenquiries@food.gov.uk

We thank you for all your help.

Yours sincerely



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