

# Babergh Foodwise



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## CASES OF LISTERIA ON THE INCREASE



Since surveillance of this food borne disease began in 1990 there have normally been around 100 cases per year in the UK. However, in 2001 this number rose to 145 with a peak of 225 in 2003. So far for the first 20 weeks of 2007 the number is at 70 the highest on record for this period of the year. Interestingly the combined recorded cases in Germany, France and the UK account for two thirds of all cases in Europe.

### How can we prevent Listeriosis?

It is not clear why cases of Listeriosis are on the increase, however the following control measures can help to ensure that your business is not affected:

- Raw food such as vegetables can be naturally contaminated however careful washing of these should reduce the amount of bacteria to a safe level.
- When producing food such as sandwiches excessive handling should be avoided, and particular care should be given to the frequent washing of hands between each task.
- Keep food for as short a time as possible Storage instructions should be observed and 'use by' dates should be strictly followed.
- Thorough cooking will kill listeria. Listeria is quickly destroyed at 75 C, but bear in mind that at 70 C it takes 2 minutes to kill the bacteria.
- Keep cooked food away from raw food Thoroughly wash kitchen utensils and equipment
- Ensure that fridges are working properly and aim to run your refrigerators at temperatures below 3 C
- Do not overfill fridges
- Throw away left-over reheated food
- Cool cooked food as rapidly as possible

### What is listeria and where it is found?

Listeria is a bacterium that can cause a rare but potentially life-threatening disease called Listeriosis.

In general bacteria are classified in three different groups according to their tolerance to various temperatures. Most food pathogens are killed by high temperatures and can't grow at low temperatures. But Listeria is unusual in that it can grow at temperatures as low as -1.5 °C, can grow quite quickly at 3° C, and can continue to grow at temperatures of up to 40° C. The bacteria can survive for long periods of time at cold temperatures (on average 20 days, but up to 130 days). It is also believed that the infective dose can be as low as 1000 bacteria.

Listeria is found in a wide variety of animals and in the soil. Contamination can occur whilst handling infected animals. However the main route of infection to the human population is from the ingestion of contaminated food. The foods most commonly associated with listeria poisoning are refrigerated ready to eat and processed foods (pate, sliced meat, sandwiches, soft cheeses, etc), however, no food is safe from contamination.

### How does it affect humans?

Healthy adults are unaffected by it, and in fact 5% of the population are believed to be healthy carriers ▶

Welcome to the 10th edition of FoodWise, Babergh's food safety newsletter for businesses. Published twice a year since 2002, the aim of FoodWise has been to bring you up to date on food safety topics that are relevant to you, in a way which is easy to understand. I hope that it has achieved this aim, and as always would welcome any feedback from you on what you have found particularly useful, what other information you would like to see, and what we could do better.

This edition looks at listeria which is a food poisoning bacteria which we don't hear too much about, but appears to be on the increase. We also have some information for you on what businesses must do if a food incident occurs, and the legal requirement for traceability. And of course Safer Food Better Business gets another mention - it's a hot topic which has appeared in every issue since Spring 2005 - this time we consider what you need to do to make sure your food safety management system stays up to date.

If you have any comments or questions, please do let us know by contacting the Food and Safety Regulation Team on 01473 825890.



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(this means that they are infected with listeria but do not show any symptoms). In some vulnerable groups however such as people with a weakened immune system, pregnant women, unborn children, and the elderly the disease can have devastating consequences, and the death rate can be high.

The symptoms of Listeriosis vary greatly, from flu like symptoms, mild infections of the eye and skin, diarrhoea, fever and, gastroenteritis, to more serious types of illness such as severe blood poisoning, meningitis, central nervous system infection, spontaneous abortion, stillbirth, or severe illness in newborn children.



Foods linked to cases of Listeriosis in England and Wales, 2003-2007:

**2003**  
In the north of England there were two clusters. One involved 17 cases which were traced back to butter, another of 18 cases where no source was identified.  
In South Wales two cases were linked to hospital sandwiches

as were five cases on the South West.

**2004**  
There was a cluster of 6 cases in the east Midlands for which no source was identified. Two cases in the south-east were linked to hospital sandwiches.

**2005**  
One case in the north-west was linked to sliced meat.

**2006**  
One case in London was traced to sliced meats.

**2007**  
One case in London was linked to hospital sandwiches.

For further information on listeria visit the Health Protection Agency's website at [www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics\\_az/listeria/menus.htm](http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/listeria/menus.htm)



## FOOD incidents

**Y**ou may not be aware that since the 1st of January 2005 there has been a legal requirement for food businesses to ensure that they have adequate traceability of food-stuffs coming in and going out of their business, and to inform their local authority and the Food Standards Agency of a 'food incidents' when they occur. This will affect food manufacturers more than caterers or retailers, but the main requirements apply to all food businesses.

### *What is a food incident?*

An incident is when there are concerns about safety of food which has been placed on the market, including where food does not meet legal requirements.

### *How can you prevent an incident happening?*

All businesses, irrespective of their size, should be taking all reasonable precautions to ensure that the food they supply meets food safety requirements. Small businesses are not expected to have complex procedures, but should consider the following:

**a)** Use trusted sources of raw materials and ingredients, for

example you should make sure that your suppliers have registered with their local authority

**b)** You could ask your suppliers which assurance schemes are available for the raw materials or ingredients that they supply, and whether they comply with these schemes. Examples include the Lion Code for shell eggs and The Red Tractor logo which indicates that the food can be traced back to farms producing under an Assured Food Standards (AFS) licence.

**c)** You could also ask your suppliers if they participate in any industry-recognised food safety management standards such as ISO 22000 from the International Organization for Standardisation or the BRC (British Retail Consortium) Standard.

**d)** Implement food safety management systems in your business. All food businesses have been required since 2006 to prepare a documented food safety management system (for example HACCP or Safer Food Better Business). Your food safety management system will identify aspects of your food operation which are critical to ensure food safety and the daily records that you keep will demonstrate that you have controlled these.

### *What should I do if a food incident happens in my business?*

If you are concerned that you have placed some food on the market that is unsafe or does not meet the legal requirements you must notify Babergh District Council and the Food Standards Agency. If the food will be harmful to consumers then the FSA must be notified immediately. If you are in any doubt contact Environmental Health for advice.

### *Why do I need traceability?*

Traceability is an essential part of your food safety management system. As a minimum you should have your records sufficiently organised to enable you to withdraw or recall unsafe food quickly. Businesses are legally required to be able to identify their suppliers and the businesses to whom they have supplied products. You should also do the following:

- identify the name and address of your suppliers of food and ingredients
- identify the customers to which you have supplied products (as far as possible - clearly caterers and retailers would not normally be expected to do this)
- identify the date of delivery or despatch and the volume or quantity
- maintain appropriate records and ensure that such information can be provided to authorities on demand.

### *How can I find out more?*

Visit the FSA website at [www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/guidancenotes/foodguide/generalfoodlaw](http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/guidancenotes/foodguide/generalfoodlaw) to see the Food Standards Agency's guidance on food safety, traceability, and withdrawal and recall of unsafe food.

# How to sustain Safer Food, Better Business

**B**y now many of you will have been operating your Safer Food Better Business (SFBB) system for more than a year. So what happens now?

Firstly, if you are one of the many businesses that has successfully implemented SFBB, well done. Hopefully you are finding it beneficial to your businesses in terms of staff training, keeping track of problems and getting them resolved and generally helping to make your food business more efficient. If you have had a visit from a Food and Safety Officer recently they will have looked through the pack to find out how you are ensuring food safety and examined the Diary in particular to check that your Safe Methods are being implemented on a daily basis.

If you have not yet implemented Safer Food Better Business or an alternative food safety management system then you must take action immediately. We are now beginning to take enforcement action against businesses that have failed to comply. However if you have recently taken over a food business or started a new business don't worry, we will of course give you a reasonable period of time to get your documentation sorted out. If you are in any doubt as to what is required please contact the Food and Safety Regulation Team on 01473 825890.

Assuming that you have got your food safety management system up and running, there are a number of things that you need to do to keep it relevant and make sure that it is implemented by all staff. You must:

- Review your Safe Methods on a regular basis and particularly if you have changed any aspects of the food operation. The 4-weekly reviews should prompt you to do this in any case. However, methods of food preparation for example can change gradually over time so it is important that you look through your Safe Methods from time to time to ensure that they still reflect what is really happening. This should be done at least annually.
- Make sure that new staff are trained in the Safe Methods that are relevant to their duties, and that this is recorded in the Staff training records in the Diary section.
- If you have changed any of your suppliers then your Suppliers List in the Diary section should be updated accordingly.
- Do keep the Diary up to date! After several months of filling it in every day you might wonder if it is worthwhile, particularly if you haven't



had many problems to report. However the legal requirement for a documented food safety management system includes a requirement for records which demonstrate that the system is being implemented. And of course if we receive a complaint about your business the Diary records would be an essential part of you due diligence defence.

In summary it is essential that the SFBB pack remains central to your food business operation. Don't forget that you can order replacement Diary packs by calling 0845 606 0667 or if you need individual pages such as staff training records these can be downloaded from the FSA website at [www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/hygleg/hyglegresources/sfbb/](http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/hygleg/hyglegresources/sfbb/). And if you need more help, contact the Food and Safety Regulation Team on 01473 825890 or email [food.safety@babergh.gov.uk](mailto:food.safety@babergh.gov.uk)

