

# Important information from **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**



## **The E. coli 0157 outbreak in Bridgend, South Wales, 2005, and its effects on food businesses following a Public Enquiry**

### **What is E. coli 0157?**

E. coli or, to give it its full name, Escherichia Coli is a common bacterium. Many types of it live harmlessly in the digestive system of people and animals.

However, E. coli 0157 produces toxins or poisons that cause illness. It is highly infectious; only a few organisms are needed to cause an infection. It can survive for quite long periods on steel such as knives and work surfaces. It can also survive refrigeration and is quite tolerant of acid, salt, and dry conditions.

Its effects can be serious and can lead to permanent kidney or brain damage, even death.

### **What are the sources of E. coli 0157 and how is it transmitted?**

The main source of E. coli 0157 is the intestines of cattle and sheep. It is usually transmitted when raw meat carrying the bacteria is allowed to contaminate other foods either directly or indirectly via knives and work equipment and food handlers. It is, however, not exclusively a food borne infection. It can also be transmitted by an infected person or animal and can be found in the environment.

### **What happened when the outbreak was reported?**

The outbreak was traced to John Tudor & Son, a Bridgend butcher and resulted in 157 cases of food poisoning. Most of the cases were children from 44 schools across four local authorities. 31 people were admitted to hospital and tragically a five year old boy, Mason Jones, died. The outbreak occurred because of food hygiene failures at the premises. William Tudor was found guilty of seven food hygiene offences, sentenced to 12 months imprisonment and banned from participation in running any food business.

### **The Pennington report**

An enquiry was then set up "to enquire into the circumstances that led to the outbreak of E. coli 0157... and into the handling of the outbreak; and to consider the implications for the future and make recommendations".



### **What were the findings?**

The outbreak was caused by cooked meat contaminated with E. coli 0157 and occurred because of a number of basic food hygiene failures including:

- ▶ **Failure to keep the premises clean and in good repair.**
- ▶ **Failure to keep equipment clean and disinfected.**  
*Cleaning was described as "sub-standard... an inspection found blood splashes, cobwebs, dead insects and congealed blood on machinery."*
- ▶ **Failure to separate the use of equipment between raw and cooked meat, in particular the vacuum packer and weighing scales.**
- ▶ **Failure to carry out critical control procedures effectively.**
- ▶ **Failure to keep proper records.**  
*Some records were falsified. On some issues the company misled and lied to Investigating Officers.*
- ▶ **Inadequate staff training.**
- ▶ **An invalid HACCP plan.**  
*This was in part positively inaccurate and misleading.*
- ▶ **A significant disregard for food safety by the company.**



# E. coli 0157 outbreak in Bridgend, South Wales, 2005

## What are the recommendations made by Professor Pennington?

He said that all food business operators and food authorities should take note of the following.

### ON FOOD SAFETY PRACTICE

- **All Food businesses must ensure that their systems and procedures are capable of preventing the contamination or cross-contamination of food with E. coli 0157.**  
*"E. coli 0157 should be at the top of your risk agenda. Do not be complacent."*
- **All food businesses must ensure that their HACCP plans are a core part of the way they run their business.**  
*"Don't let it slip."*
- **More resources should be made available to food businesses.**  
*The Food Standards Agency is looking at ways of producing extra resources to help butchers. Remember that NNDC's Commercial Team is always available to provide advice and assistance.*
- **The use of the same equipment for both raw and ready to eat meats is a complex microbiological issue. It is difficult making equipment safe, bearing in mind the very low infective dose of E. coli 0157.**  
*Professor Pennington thinks that the dual use of vacuum packers for ready to eat foods and raw meats is unsafe.*
- **The Food Standards Agency should review its current guidance and generate new guidance where needed.**

### ON FOOD HYGIENE INSPECTIONS

- **The Local Authority should use their full range of enforcement options against food businesses that present a serious risk to health and that persistently fail to comply with requirements.**
- **Food inspectors should routinely check all documentation to make sure it is adequate.** Food businesses must make sure this is readily available and up to date.
- **All inspections should be unannounced. They should include questioning the proprietor and employees, checks on documentation and observations.** Sound judgements can then be made about confidence in a business's management of food safety.

## What has been the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) response to the public inquiry report?

- The FSA has advised that all local authorities should review their policies and procedures against the issues raised in the report. The dual use of equipment such as vacuum packing machinery is being reviewed.
- This newsletter forms part of this review by bringing these matters to your attention.

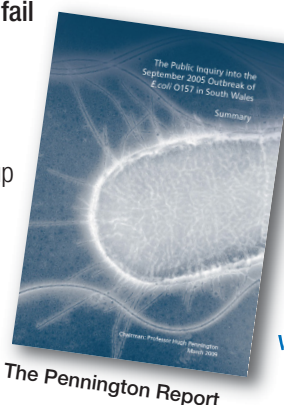
## So what happens now? Is there anything I should be doing to ensure that my business is safe?

Yes there is. This report has important implications for us all. Use this simple checklist to identify any gaps in your food safety management plan.

- ▶ Do I have to have a documented procedure in place for all aspects of my business?
- ▶ Can I provide evidence of this to the inspecting food safety officer?
- ▶ Are all my documents and records up to date?
- ▶ Are all my food handlers trained in these procedures?
- ▶ Can I be sure that my procedures prevent the cross contamination of ready to eat /cooked foods by bacteria from raw meat?  
*Remember this can take place directly by storing raw meat above or next to cooked meat or indirectly by using the same equipment for raw and cooked meats or by not properly washing hands after handling raw meat.*
- ▶ Can I ensure that all equipment which comes into contact with food is effectively cleaned and disinfected and that cleaning and disinfection takes place often enough to avoid risk of contamination?

If your answer is **No** to any of the above then you must review your food safety management system immediately and contact your inspecting food safety officer who will be able to offer some further guidance.

Professor Pennington's full report into the inquiry can be found at [www.ecoliinquirywales.org](http://www.ecoliinquirywales.org)



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NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL  
HOLT ROAD, CROMER, NORFOLK NR27 9EN  
TELEPHONE: 01263 513811

[www.northnorfolk.org](http://www.northnorfolk.org)

