

Levels of AMR Campylobacter in retail chickens remain steady

The survey tested a subset of the Campylobacter isolates (Campylobacter jejuni and Campylobacter coli strains) from Year 3 of the UK retail chicken survey for AMR. Analysis was carried out between August 2016 and July 2017 during which 585 Campylobacter isolates from samples of whole, UK-produced, fresh chicken were tested.

Background

The development and spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a concern worldwide. The use of antibiotics is important in treating infections and preventing disease from arising in both animals and humans. However, the overuse and/or misuse of antibiotics in both animal husbandry and healthcare settings has been linked to the emergence and spread of microorganisms which are resistant to them, rendering treatment ineffective and posing a risk to public health.

The transmission of AMR microorganisms through the food chain is thought to be one of the routes by which people are exposed to AMR bacteria. However, there is uncertainty around the contribution food makes to the problem of AMR in human infections.

This report presents AMR data for a subset of Campylobacter isolates collected as part of the survey of Campylobacter contamination in fresh whole UK-produced chilled chickens at retail sale. There is a continued need to monitor the prevalence and types of AMR bacteria in retail chicken and other foods to inform a baseline and also the risk to public health.

What the results show

[Read the report: AMR in Campylobacter from retail chilled chicken in the UK \(Year 3: 2016-17\)](#)

Overall, the proportions of AMR Campylobacter isolates found in this study were similar to those reported in the previous survey year (July 2015 to July 2016), although the percentage of *C. coli* isolates with resistance to erythromycin was lower. Multi-drug resistance was similar to that found in the previous survey years.

Differences in levels of ciprofloxacin and tetracycline resistance for isolates from standard and free-range birds were examined. There were no differences within *C. jejuni* isolates but a higher proportion of *C. coli* isolates from free-range chickens were resistant, compared to isolates recovered from standard chickens. However, relatively few isolates were tested and this result has not been found in previous surveys.

FSA's Science lead in Microbiological Risk Assessment, Paul Cook said:

'While there is evidence that AMR Campylobacter is present on whole fresh chickens sold at retail in the UK, the risk of getting AMR-related infections through eating or preparing contaminated meat remains very low as long as you follow good hygiene

and cooking practices.

'Tackling AMR is a significant priority for the FSA and across UK Government. This survey allows us to monitor AMR Campylobacter in retail chickens over time and overall results have remained stable.'

Year 3 Campylobacter retail chicken survey

The FSA has also published the [Year 3 report for the UK retail chicken survey](#). This report collates the data for August 2016-July 2017 which has previously been published quarterly.

Compared to previous years of the retail survey, the report shows that the average proportion of fresh, whole chicken at retail sale in the UK that are contaminated with a high level of Campylobacter decreased considerably for this period.

Consumer advice

Chicken is safe as long as you follow good hygiene and cooking practices.

- cover raw chicken and store at the bottom of the fridge so juices cannot drip onto other foods and contaminate them with food poisoning bacteria such as Campylobacter
- don't wash raw chicken - thorough cooking will kill any bacteria present, including Campylobacter, while washing chicken can spread germs by splashing
- thoroughly wash and clean all utensils, chopping boards and surfaces used to prepare raw chicken
- wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water, after handling raw chicken - this helps stop the spread of Campylobacter by avoiding cross-contamination
- make sure chicken is cooked thoroughly and steaming hot all the way through before serving. Cut into the thickest part of the meat and check that it is steaming hot with no pink meat and that the juices run clear.