

Update on investigation into food supply chain linked to listeria

The Food Standards Agency is leading the investigation into the food supply chain to identify the source of the listeria strain linked to the recent hospital cases with the support of Food Standards Scotland and local authorities. Products directly linked to the cases were identified and these were withdrawn from the food chain on the same day as the link was established. This strain was traced back to a producer which withdrew all their ready-to-eat foods on a precautionary basis. Investigations are continuing to try and determine the point of origin of the listeria strain.

- All confirmed cases to date have been linked to sandwiches produced by The Good Food Chain. The Good Food Chain voluntarily ceased production on 5 June and withdrew all products which remained in date. Evidence suggests that all individuals ate the affected products in hospitals before the withdrawal took place on the 25 May. No cases of listeriosis linked to this outbreak have been confirmed in people outside of hospital settings and therefore the risk to the public remains low.
- The same strain of listeria was identified in meat produced by North Country Cooked Meats used by The Good Food Chain. North Country Cooked Meats, and their distributor North Country Quality Foods, voluntarily stopped distributing on 3 June and a withdrawal of all ready to eat products has been carried out on a precautionary basis. The products supplied by North Country Quality Foods to other businesses have not led to any reported cases to date. Both North Country Cooked Meats and North Country Quality Foods remain closed.
- The investigation is now focused on identifying the source of the listeria infections. It is examining the supply chain of North Country Cooked Meats and looking at historical detections of listeria, including those within permitted legal limits. Further testing of products and environments for listeria is also being conducted to identify whether a match to the outbreak strain can be found.

Following extensive testing and verification by Stafford Borough Council, The Good Food Chain is no longer part of the ongoing investigation into the source of the outbreak. With the investigation now focusing on suppliers further up the food supply chain, The Good Food Chain can restart production.

However, to ensure public health continues to be protected, an enhanced set of food safety measures are now in place and the local authority will continue to carry out strict monitoring and oversight of the company for the next three months, with further supervision to be determined by inspection findings. The business will have to reapply for accreditation before it can directly supply the NHS again.

These measures include:

- The business has been verified as meeting food safety legislation and as following best practice for manufacturing, cleaning and environmental standards.
- The site has undergone a comprehensive deep-cleaning process. Extensive environmental swabbing indicates the site is clear of potential sources of any strain of *Listeria monocytogenes*, including the outbreak strain.

- The food safety hazard plan has been reviewed and will continue to be verified to ensure it is fit for purpose once production restarts.
- Enhanced oversight will be carried out by Stafford Borough Council which includes additional product sampling, environmental testing and enhanced incoming supply verification.

Dr Colin Sullivan, Chief Operating Officer at the FSA said:

“This is a complex investigation, but we have worked to swiftly identify and remove from the food chain the products linked to these hospital cases.

“Our investigations are now focused on where the outbreak strain originated from and subject to strict verification and ongoing monitoring by Stafford Borough Council, The Good Food Chain company is now able to restart production.

“The company will be carefully monitored to ensure public health continues to be protected.

“Our thoughts remain with the families of those who have passed away.”

Councillor Jonathan Price, the Cabinet Member for Environment at Stafford Borough Council, said:

“We have worked tirelessly with the Good Food Chain and are reassured that their manufacturing processes, cleaning procedures and environmental standards meet those we expect for producing ready to eat foods.”

“But our work does not stop there as the health of the public is our top priority.

“So we will continue collecting environmental swabs from surfaces at the business, taking samples of food, and working with The Good Food Chain to ensure they have control measures in place to thoroughly assess those supplying products to them.”

Public Health England (PHE) and Health Protection Scotland (HPS) are testing all recent samples of listeria to check if they are linked to this outbreak.

For more details see PHE update: www.gov.uk/government/news/listeria-cases-being-investigated.