

From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

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To: Chief Executives HSC Trusts (*for dissemination to Heads of Procurement, Risk management Teams, Heads of Catering/Hotel Services, all Ward Managers, Heads of Communications*)
Medical Directors (*for dissemination to Consultant Microbiologists, Consultants in Infectious Diseases, Infection Prevention and Control Leads*)
Chief Executives HSS Boards
Directors of Public Health HSS Boards (*for dissemination to Public Health Staff*)
Members of NI Chief Environmental Health Officers Group
Director, Food Standards Agency NI (*for Members NI Food Liaison Group*)
Director Regional Supplies Service
Procurement Director, Regional Supplies Service

Dear Colleague

KEY STEPS FOR MINIMISING THE RISK OF LISTERIOSIS FROM HIGH-RISK READY TO EAT FOODS

I am writing to remind those involved in the provision of food in healthcare settings of key steps they should take to minimise the risk of listeriosis. This advice has been endorsed by the Food Standards Agency, Northern Ireland (FSA).

Background

Listeria monocytogenes can be present in chilled ready-to-eat foods at low levels; however poor temperature controls and failure to adhere to shelf life guidance can enable the bacteria to grow to potentially hazardous levels. Vulnerable people are particularly susceptible to infection.

Across the UK there have been recent incidents involving clusters of listeriosis cases in which chilled ready-to-eat foods served in healthcare settings were investigated as possible sources, including the recent outbreak in Belfast Trust Hospitals. In addition, the Health Protection Agency has identified an increase in listeriosis, predominantly involving the over 60s with underlying medical conditions, in England and Wales since 2001.

Advice for and Action Required by HSC Trusts

1. All foods consumed by hospital patients should be free from potential pathogens, including *L. monocytogenes*, and those responsible for procuring chilled ready to eat foods for hospitals should ensure the safety of vulnerable patients in their care. Foods which carry a greater risk for Listeria – such as pate, soft mould-ripened or blue-veined cheeses – should not be given to vulnerable patients. Businesses manufacturing such high risk foods, including sandwiches, should aim to ensure *Listeria monocytogenes* is absent from their product wherever possible. The British Sandwich Association recommend a target level of <10 cfu/g for *Listeria monocytogenes* in sandwiches and a use-by date of production plus two days.
2. It is recommended that Trusts should specify in their contracts that independent retailers on hospital sites should ensure high risk ready to eat foods are procured from approved suppliers.
3. Trust should ensure that written food safety procedures for hospitals include ward kitchens, and that ward fridges should be monitored regularly to ensure temperatures remain below 5 degrees C and adequate stock rotation of foods. Temperature control should be maintained from production until food is served, and chilled ready to eat foods including sandwiches should be consumed as close as possible to their production date.
4. A fact sheet (attached) has been produced by FSA to raise awareness and provide general information on the key steps to minimise the risk of listeriosis from chilled ready-to-eat foods. Please note that this advice applies from delivery until consumption, including storage periods and during distribution to patients. Care should also be taken to ensure chilled ready-to-eat foods are not kept on the wards at room temperature. A copy of the factsheet can also be found online at: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/listeria.pdf>
Trusts should ensure this fact sheet is disseminated to all relevant staff in the organisation.
5. Trust Ward staff should highlight to visitors that they should only bring in food for patients after discussion with the nurse in charge and that it is important that chilled ready-to-eat foods brought in to hospitals are eaten immediately and leftovers disposed of.
6. Environmental Health Officers will visit all hospitals in Northern Ireland in the near future to ensure that listeriosis has been considered in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) risk reduction programmes and that appropriate control measures have been put in place. **Trusts should work with Environmental Health Officers to ensure these control measures are in place.**

Further information on *Listeria monocytogenes* is available at <http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&Page&HPAwebAutoListName/Page/1191942172752?p=1191942172752>.

Yours sincerely



Dr M McBride
Chief Medical Officer

