

Scientists help food firms fight Listeria

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East Midlands food businesses that make, distribute and sell chilled, ready-to-eat products are to be given help and advice to help them keep their products safe from a dangerous food-poisoning bacteria.

According to data from the [Food Standards Agency](#) (FSA) serious cases of laboratory-confirmed Listeria infection in the UK almost doubled between 2000 and 2009. In 2010 numbers decreased but there is still a concern since the infection, although relatively rare, causes more deaths from [food](#) poisoning in the UK than other [foodborne bacteria](#).

Scientists at The University of Nottingham's School of Biosciences are working with the food hygiene specialists, [Diversey](#), to turn the spotlight on the issue, thanks to a research and development grant from the [Food and Drink iNet](#), part of the trade organisation [The Food and Drink Forum](#).

Dr Cath Rees from the University's Division of Food Sciences said "Listeria in humans is exclusively a food borne disease. Despite research we cannot explain the increase in numbers seen in the UK and this has led the Food Standards Agency to identify this [bacterium](#) as a priority area for action. The biology of this bacterium makes it very difficult to control both in raw ingredients and in food production areas. Our latest research has been focussing on how best to clean equipment to keep this bacterium out of the food chain, and we will be sharing our results with the food industry in this seminar."

An unseen culinary danger

Listeria can be found in a range of foods – particularly ready-to-eat [meat products](#), pâtés, fish and prepared fruit and vegetables, but serious infection tends to occur only in people with reduced immunity, such as the over-60s, pregnant women, new-born babies and those undergoing long term treatments.

As the elderly and those with already-weakened immune systems are particularly at risk, the FSA is targeting food provision in the [National Health Service](#) as well as examining how these vulnerable groups store and handle food they buy themselves.

The campaign is also targeting small and medium-sized food manufacturers, distributors and retailers to help reduce the risk of infection. Tests have shown most Listeria-related incidents have involved chilled ready-to-eat meats, meat products, cheese, fish and shellfish as well as sandwiches and sandwich fillings.

Listeria masterclass for food businesses

As part of the project, a seminar is being run to give small and medium-

sized businesses in the chilled food sector, guidance and advice about how to manage the risk of Listeria. The seminar will be held in the Plant Sciences Building at the University's Sutton Bonington campus between 4 pm and 6.45 pm on Wednesday February 13 2013.

It will include a food industry update by Dr Cath Rees from The University of Nottingham, and Dr Karen Middleton, from Diversey will discuss good hygiene practices, before Dr Jerry Avis gives an introduction to the University's Food and Biofuel Innovation Centre.

Food and Drink iNet director Richard Worrall said: "It is important that food businesses are able to play their part in tackling the increase in cases of listeriosis.

"This event is particularly aimed at technical managers, production managers and owner-managers of small and medium-sized food businesses. Everyone attending will receive a guidance document containing the latest advice on how best to control Listeria."

Provided by University of Nottingham

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