EFSA draft opinion on *L. monocytogenes* in RTE foods: what are the objectives?

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efsa
European Food Safety Authority

BACKGROUND

- EFSA activities (see before)
- Significant increase in reported confirmed human listeriosis cases (EFSA and ECDC, 2015)

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Campylobacter and Listeria infections still rising in the EU – say EFSA and ECDC

Human cases of listeriosis and campylobacteriosis rose once again in 2014, continuing an upward trend that began in 2008. Salmonellosis cases increased slightly for the first time since 2008. These are the main findings of the latest annual report by EFSA and ECDC on zoonoses and foodborne outbreaks in the European Union.

Listeriosis infections reported in humans increased by 16% compared with 2013: there were 2,161 confirmed cases in 2014. Although this number is relatively low, the rise of reported listeriosis cases is of concern as the surveillance of these infections is focused on severe forms of the disease, with higher death rates than for other food-borne diseases, particularly among the elderly, and patients with a weak immune system. However, *Listeria monocytogenes*, the bacterium that causes listeriosis in humans and animals, seldom exceeded the legal safety limits in ready-to-eat foods – the most common foodborne source of human infections.

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Campylobacteriosis cases stable, listeriosis cases continue to rise, say EFSA and ECDC

Campylobacteriosis infections reported in humans have now stabilised, after several years of an increasing trend, but it is still the most commonly reported foodborne disease in the EU. Listeriosis and VTEC infections in humans have increased, while reported salmonellosis and yersiniosis cases have decreased. These are some of the key findings of the *European Union Summary Report on Trends and Sources of Zoonoses, Zoonotic Agents and Food-borne Outbreaks in 2013*.

"The stabilisation of campylobacteriosis cases and the continuing downward trend of salmonellosis is good news, but we should not lower our guard as reporting of other diseases such as listeriosis and VTEC infections is going up," says Marta Hugas, Head of Department of EFSA's Risk Assessment and Scientific Assistance Department, who stresses the importance of monitoring foodborne illnesses in Europe.

Listeriosis and VTEC infections on the rise

Listeriosis cases increased by 8.6 percent between 2012 and 2013 and have been increasing over the pastfive years. Although the number of confirmed cases is relatively low at 1,763, these are of particular concern as the reported *Listeria* infections are mostly severe, invasive forms of the disease with higher death rates than for the other foodborne diseases. "The rise of reported invasive listeriosis cases is of great concern as the infection is acquired mostly from ready-to-eat food and it may lead to death, particularly among the increasing population of elderly people and patients with weakened immunity in Europe", says Mike Catchpole, the Chief Scientist at ECDC. Despite the rise of listeriosis cases reported in humans, *Listeria monocytogenes*, the bacterium that causes listeriosis in humans and animals, was seldom detected above the legal safety limits in ready-to-eat foods.

BACKGROUND

- ECDC surveillance report (ECDC, 2015)
  - The notification rates of listeriosis increased rapidly by age in the older age groups (over 65 years)
  - Male cases were predominant in groups over 45 years of age. Their risk of infection was twice as high as the risk for women in the same age group
- *Listeria* outbreaks (EFSA and ECDC, 2015)
  - In 2013, 12 *Listeria* outbreaks were reported in the EU. This was more than in 2011 (eight) and 2012 (nine)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

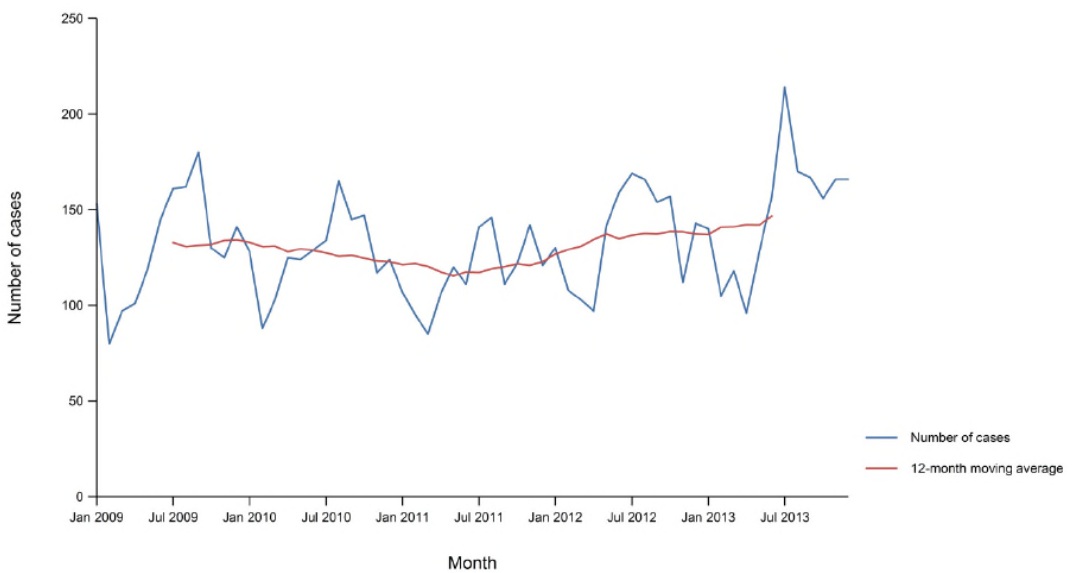
The BIOHAZ panel is requested by EFSA to issue a Scientific Opinion on *Listeria monocytogenes (Lm)* contamination of ready-to-eat (RTE) foods and the risk for human health in the EU. In particular, the BIOHAZ Panel is requested:

ToR 1 - To summarise and critically evaluate the most recent information on *Lm* in RTE foods, and in particular from:

- the EU-wide baseline survey and monitoring data
- the three ongoing EFSA outsourcing activities

TERMS OF REFERENCE

ToR 2 - To discuss and evaluate the factors related to the contamination in the food chain and the consumption patterns that may contribute to the reported trend of listeriosis incidence in the EU



Source: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Croatia, Italy and Luxembourg did not report data over the whole period at the level of detail required for the analysis. Portugal has no surveillance system for listeriosis.

Figure 7. Trend in reported confirmed cases of human listeriosis in the EU/EEA, 2009-2013