

November 2015

Unfortunately due to a lack of interest and availability, the auditor workshop scheduled for 27 November 2015 was cancelled. This newsletter is the first in a series that will be released providing information which was proposed to be discussed at the workshop. This edition provides an overview of recent Salmonella outbreaks for your information.

Salmonella outbreaks

There has been a significant increase in Salmonella notifications in Queensland since late 2014, specifically in the south east corner. While the outbreaks have been traced back to a variety of manufacturing and retail settings, a large portion have occurred in high risk food businesses including catering operations and food service to vulnerable populations who have accredited food safety programs.

While the Department does not have an issue with how auditors are conducting their functions in these food businesses, it is considered that auditors are in a frontline position to help identify and report any areas which may assist in reducing these food borne illness outbreaks.

Between 1 January and 31 October 2015 there have been 4,755 cases of Salmonella notified in Queensland which is 1.8 times the 5-year (2010 – 2014) mean of 2,653 cases for the same period. Salmonella Typhimurium notifications contributed to 40% (1,888 notifications) of the total number of Salmonella notifications received in this period. Salmonella Typhimurium is usually associated with eggs and poultry and is seasonal with notifications peaking in summer, hence your assistance is sought to help reduce notifications this summer.

The Salmonella outbreaks were declared a public health incident of statewide significance in November 2014. To address the issue, a whole-of-government plan has been developed to implement a foodborne pathogen risk reduction strategy, with collaboration from Queensland Health, Safe Food Production Queensland and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries – Biosecurity Queensland. A team has been established within Food Safety Standards and Regulation to provide oversight to the outbreak management and to plan and implement strategic longer term work. The key strategies are to:

- engage with local government to identify ways to improve food business inspection practices, including better identification of high risk food handling practices
- enhance surveillance of Salmonella in Queensland
- obtain intelligence to understand the organism's transmission
- improve risk management during production and processing
- improve food safety at the food service level
- promote food hygiene and food safety practices in the community.

During investigation of the recent Salmonella food borne illness outbreaks, the main issues identified include:

- the use of cracked and dirty eggs

- egg wash that had been topped up, used multiple times and kept at room temperature for long periods of time
- raw eggs products such as mayonnaise, aioli, hollandaise, mousse and tiramisu prepared too far in advance and not refrigerated
- misinterpretation or no understanding of the 2 hour/4 hour rule
- inadequate cleaning and sanitation throughout food businesses
- cross contamination via tea towels and other equipment which the food handlers did not know how to dismantle for proper cleaning
- lightly cooked egg products such as scrambled eggs (which either is not cooked properly or has raw egg cracked over top)
- the method of cracking bulk eggs into a large container and straining out the shell (leading to contamination on the shell being mixed through the egg product and
- deviation from food businesses accredited food safety program and approved suppliers.

As we enter the summer period, it would be appreciated if auditors when undertaking audits could check food businesses procedures and practices associated with eggs (whether it is addressed specifically in their food safety program or not) and report any issues or concerns to the relevant local government.

While it is not a mandatory requirement and is not enforceable, it is recommended that all aged care facilities use pasteurised egg products.

For your information, please find attached a food safety alert released in February 2015 relating to egg safety for the vulnerable. Other recently produced fact sheets can be found on the Queensland Health website at www.health.qld.gov.au/publications/news-alerts/health-alerts/salmonella-factsheet.pdf and www.health.qld.gov.au/publications/news-alerts/health-alerts/salmonella-market-stalls.pdf

Contact us –

Should you have any enquiries or concerns regarding this information or any other auditing enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact Food Safety Standards and Regulation as noted below. Alternatively, the guideline *Management of food safety programs, Food Act 2006* available at www.health.qld.gov.au provides detailed information relating to food safety programs and auditing.

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