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PRESS RELEASE

Zoonoses report: *Listeria* infections stable but frequently reported among the elderly

European experts have noted an increasing trend of listeriosis since 2008, but they highlight that the number of affected people stabilised from 2014 to 2015. Infections were mostly reported in people over 64 years of age. These are some of the findings of the latest annual report by EFSA and ECDC on zoonotic diseases, which also includes the latest trends on salmonellosis, campylobacteriosis, and foodborne outbreaks in the European Union.

Listeriosis affected about 2,200 people in 2015, causing 270 deaths – the highest number ever reported in the EU. The proportion of cases in the over 64 age group steadily increased from 56% in 2008 to 64% in 2015. Additionally, in this period, the number of reported cases and their proportion has almost doubled in those over 84 years.

“It is concerning that there continues to be an increasing trend of *Listeria* cases which mostly occur in the elderly population. ECDC is working together with Member States to enhance surveillance for food- and waterborne diseases, starting with *Listeria*, as earlier detection of relevant clusters and outbreaks can help prevent further cases,” said Mike Catchpole, Chief Scientist at ECDC. “This is a public health threat that can and needs to be addressed”, he added.

Dr. Marta Hugas, Head of Biological Hazards and Contaminants at EFSA, said: “*Listeria* seldom exceeded the legal safety limits in ready-to-eat foods, the most common foodborne source of human infections. However, it is important that consumers follow manufacturers’ storage instructions and the guidelines given by national authorities on the consumption of foods.”

In 2015, there were 229,213 reported cases of **campylobacteriosis**. This disease remains the most commonly reported foodborne disease in the EU, showing an upward trend since 2008. *Campylobacter* is mostly found in chickens and chicken meat.

The number of cases of **salmonellosis**, the second most commonly reported foodborne disease in the EU, increased slightly – from 92,007 in 2014 to 94,625 in 2015. The increase observed in the past two years is partly due to improvements in surveillance and better diagnostic methods. However, the long-term trend is still declining and most Member States met their *Salmonella* reduction targets for poultry populations.

Salmonella is mainly found in meat (poultry) intended to be cooked before consumption.

Foodborne outbreaks

There were 4,362 reported foodborne outbreaks in 2015. The most common cause of outbreaks was *Salmonella* associated with consumption of eggs. However, the number of *Salmonella* outbreaks has fallen by 41 % since 2010.

Notes to editors

- The EFSA-ECDC report is based on data collected by 32 European countries (28 Member States and Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein) and helps the European Commission and reporting countries to monitor, control and prevent zoonotic diseases. It covers zoonotic infections, including yersiniosis, VTEC infections, echinococcosis, and Q fever, amongst others.
- Zoonoses are diseases that can be transmitted directly or indirectly between animals and humans. Zoonotic foodborne diseases are transmitted by consuming contaminated foodstuffs.
- Listeriosis is a disease caused by *Listeria monocytogenes*, which is widespread in the environment. These bacteria can grow at low temperatures and are tolerant of high salt concentrations and therefore can survive in processed, preserved and refrigerated ready-to-eat foods such as processed meat and fish, cold meats, dairy products, such as soft cheese, butter and milk, especially if unpasteurised; and pre-prepared sandwiches and salads. After consumption of contaminated foods, most healthy individuals do not develop any notable symptoms. However, in people with a weakened immune system, pregnant women, new-borns and the elderly listeriosis may lead to meningitis, brain infection, and severe bloodstream infection. All clinical presentations are treatable with prolonged courses of antibiotics, but the prognosis of the most serious invasive infections is poor.

More information:

- [The European Union summary report on trends and sources of zoonoses, zoonotic agents and food-borne outbreaks in 2015](#)
- [Listeria topic A-Z](#) – EFSA
- [Listeriosis](#) - ECDC
- [ECDC's Food- and Waterborne Diseases and Zoonoses Programme](#)
- [EFSA – Zoonotic diseases](#)

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