2013-03-24-011 Cryptosporidiosis - UK: food borne
To: (03) Food-borne, water-borne and air-borne diseases;

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CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS - UK: FOOD BORNE
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A ProMED-mail post
Date: Wed 20 Mar 2013
Source: Telegraph UK [edited]
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/9939839/Ready-to-eat-salads-from-Morrisons-and-Asda-caused-infection-outbreak-HPA-say.html>

"Ready-to-eat" salads from 2 major supermarket chains were behind a stomach infection which poisoned 300 shoppers, the Health Protection Agency has claimed.

Cryptosporidia have been traced back to pre-cut bagged salad products which are likely to have been labelled as "ready-to-eat," the HPA said. The salads are believed to have been bought from Morrisons and Asda, although an HPA spokeswoman pointed out that most supermarket chains in the UK have the same suppliers, so any one of them could have been affected.

A sample of 25 percent of those who became unwell found 46 percent recalled eating mixed-leaf bagged salad from Morrisons, while 11 percent ate spinach from the Asda chain, the HPA reported. The recall rate is "extremely high," as people often cannot remember what they bought, and the figures provide a "statistically significant association," the agency say.

Experts believe that the cryptosporidium infection may have come from the spinach, which would have been in both bags. But Morrisons denied that claim, saying the HPA seemed to want to make an "eye catching announcement" before they are disbanded in 2 weeks.

The infection is caused by a parasite [_Cryptosporidium_] in the intestine, which causes an acute, short term infection, the most common symptom of which is diarrhoea. The pre-packed salads have come under criticism before, with scientists claiming that they would lead to an increase in food poisoning.

After the cryptosporidium outbreak in England and Scotland in May 2012, the HPA launched an investigation. The outbreak was short lived, with most experiencing only moderate symptoms, and the numbers of cases returned to expected seasonal levels within a month of the 1st cases being reported. When they interviewed the people who became unwell about their food history, the HPA discovered the link between the illness and the salads sold at the 2 supermarkets.

This is not the 1st time pre-packaged vegetables have been linked to illness. A salmonella outbreak in the UK in 2007 was traced back to imported basil, while an _E. coli_ outbreak in America in 2006 was linked back to pre-packed baby spinach. A link to spinach from retailers other than Morrisons and Asda was also suggested but was found to be inconclusive. A spokesperson said: "Together, these findings suggest that one or more types of salad vegetables could have been contaminated."

The HPA confirmed that they could not identify contaminated products in any particular chain of supermarkets because of the time lapse, but interviewing a sample of those who fell ill was a investigation method accepted by health organisations across the world.

The Food Standards Agency also gathered information on the production and distribution of salad vegetables to try to identify the likely source of the outbreak. But despite investigating the food chain, including the practice and procedures throughout each stage of growing, processing, packing and distribution, they have not managed to identify a source of contamination.

Bagged salad on sale in supermarkets is often sourced from the same suppliers for most leaf types, often with common production lines packing product for several retailers at the same time. This was the situation in this case. Dr Stephen Morton, regional director of the HPA's Yorkshire and the Humber region and head of the multi-agency Outbreak Control Team, said: "This outbreak was fortunately short lived, but it was important to see if we could find the source. Our findings suggest that eating mixed leaf bagged salad was the most likely cause of illness. It is, however, often difficult to identify the source of short lived outbreaks of this type, as by the time that the outbreak can be investigated, the affected food and much of the microbiological evidence may no longer be available."

"As this was an isolated and short lived outbreak, there is no specific action for the public to take, but we hope the investigations between the FSA and the food industry will help to prevent further outbreaks of this type from happening again." The FSA added: "This would appear to have been an isolated, short-lived outbreak, and it does not appear that there are any on-going problems." They said that consumers should continue to have "confidence" in ready to eat products.

Dr Alison Gleadle, director of food safety at the FSA, reminded people to keep their kitchens clean and wash non-ready-to-eat vegetables. Morrisons say that there is no conclusive evidence for a link between their salad and the outbreak. A spokesperson said: "Morrisons is not the source of this outbreak. We have received no complaints of

illness, and no Morrisons products have tested positive for cryptosporidia. The HPA's claim is based solely on statistics, not testing. The very same statistics also implicated products from other retailers that the HPA recognise as "implausible." ... "The HPA appears to be concerned with making an eye catching announcement before being disbanded in 2 weeks time."

There are a number of potential sources for the cryptosporidium parasite, including consumption of contaminated water or food, swimming in contaminated water, or through contact with contaminated food or affected animals. Asda have also denied links to the virus outbreak, claiming that investigation by the HPA is "statistically flawed." A spokesperson added: "Product safety is our top priority, and if we had any serious concerns, we'd act immediately. So far, this has not been necessary."

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[Food processing and manufacture are increasingly centralized and distributed to many shops. This increases the risk of infecting many people at different locations. Food borne outbreaks of salmonella, Vero-toxin producing _E. coli_, VTEC, hepatitis A and E, and many other pathogens are described below. - Mod.EP

A HealthMap/ProMED-mail map can be accessed at:
<http://healthmap.org/r/1lNY>.]

[see also:
2012

Cryptosporidiosis - UK (03): (Wales): 20120915.1295349
Hepatitis A - Philippines: (Aguio), food-borne 20120908.1286649
Cryptosporidiosis - UK (02): multiple areas: 20120602.1154339
Cryptosporidiosis - UK: (Wales): 20120512.1131007
Hepatitis A - The Netherlands (02): possible food-borne outbreak 20120212.1039877
2011

Hepatitis E - France: (SE), autochthonous & food-borne 20110412.1157
2010

Konzo, food-borne paralysis - Congo DR 20100402.1059
Trypanosomiasis - Brazil: (AM) food-borne 20100112.0146
2007

Norovirus, food-borne - Spain, USA 20071123.3795
2005

Salmonellosis, food-borne - Canada (ON) 20050516.1344
Cryptosporidiosis - UK (Wales) 20051202.3476
Cryptosporidiosis - UK (Scotland) (03) 20050430.1211
Cryptosporidiosis - UK (Scotland) (02) 20050427.1170
Cryptosporidiosis - UK (Scotland) 20050424.1149
Salmonellosis, food-borne - Australia (VIC)(05) 20050127.0298
2003

Cryptosporidiosis - UK (Scotland): background 20031015.2595
Cryptosporidiosis - UK (Scotland) 20031014.2591
2002

Cryptosporidiosis, water supply - UK (Scotland) (03) 20020808.4995
2001

Cryptosporidiosis - UK (Northern Ireland) (02) 20010504.0862
2000

Cryptosporidiosis - UK (Northern Ireland) (02) 20000904.1508
Cryptosporidiosis - UK ex Spain (Majorca) 20000808.1322
Cryptosporidiosis - UK (Scotland) 20000605.0903
Cryptosporidiosis, human - UK (England): CORRECTION 20000423.0600
Cryptosporidiosis, human ex sheep - UK (England) 20000419.0569
1999

Cryptosporidiosis, swimming pools - UK (England) 19991125.2087
Cryptosporidiosis - UK (NW England) 19990514.0788
1998

Cryptosporidiosis - UK (04) 19980520.0963
Cryptosporidiosis - UK (03) 19980512.0935
Cryptosporidiosis - UK (02) 19980511.0930
Cryptosporidiosis - UK 19980510.0927]
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