

LEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST E. COLI O157

# HUSH NEWSLETTER



## TRAGEDY IN WALES

At the time of going to print, South Wales is in the grip of one of the country's largest outbreaks of E.coli O157.

The latest figures indicate that 160 people, mostly children, have tested positive for E.coli O157 and 38 schools are affected. Several children have been rushed to hospital for lifesaving dialysis and tragically, five year-old Mason Jones died after he and his brother both became ill.

The investigation into the outbreak has centred on the supply of cooked meats from John Tudor & Son in Bridgend. Environmental Health Officers have contacted hundreds of caterers, shops, delicatessens and pubs to identify and withdraw meat products purchased from John Tudor & Son.

The company, operating since 1955, has supplied local authorities without problem since 1964 and is co-operating fully with health officers. Tests carried out on 19th September have proved negative with further test results awaited. However there is evidence to show *"an imminent risk of injury to health"* from the *"unsanitary condition of the premises resulting from inadequate disinfection procedures."* Authorities said a *"vac packing process which allows cross-contamination"* was *"in an unclean condition and which is located underneath the electronic fly-killer."*

Many parents are angry that schools have not been closed during the outbreak to prevent the spread. Sonia Riddiford from Aberdare, whose nine year-old son Liam was one of the first children to be affected said that parents wanted answers. *"After the initial worry about what was wrong with him, I just feel very angry now,"* she said. *"We are living in a society where hygiene is so much of a priority that something like this shouldn't happen"*.

Welsh First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, has denied claims that they have been slow to respond to the outbreak and said he was *"absolutely"* committed to a full inquiry.

Stephen Webber, of solicitors Hugh James, said the parents' priority was that children recovered, but that legal action may follow. He said: *"The main concern is that there is a full public, open inquiry to find out what's happened, why it's happened, and to stop anything like this happening again."*

***Mr Webber's comments will strike a chord with those involved in the Wishaw Outbreak of 1996—families at that time demanded and got an inquiry to find out what happened, why it happened and to stop it happening again...***

## Members Fundraising

HUSH founding member Debbie Holden was delighted when her employers, the Veterans Agency, agreed to adopt the charity for a number of fundraising events.



Debbie and her husband Mike first became aware of E.coli O157 and the potential dangers in 1996 when their daughter Jessica, then aged 2½, became poorly with sickness and diarrhoea. Two days later, Jessica had visited the doctor and was on the mend when her elder sister, Sarah, 5 years old, developed the same symptoms. Sarah continued to deteriorate but it wasn't until Mike read an article about Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome, that they really started to worry. Sadly, Sarah died within hours of emergency surgery at Manchester Children's Hospital.

After discussions with other families who had suffered a similar tragedy it was agreed that the need existed for a charity to support families affected by E.coli O157 and HUS and also to press Government Departments to implement changes that would ensure others would not suffer as they had. HUSH was formed Debbie and Mike continue to actively support it.

Over the summer months employees at the Veterans Agency have raised £255 on a quiz night, £400 on a raffle and £778 on a grand auction.

The annual sponsored walk organised in June by Debbie and Mike (*reported in the previous newsletter*) has brought in a total of £1,044 to date with more money still to be handed in.

We appreciate the efforts of everyone involved in this fundraising and extend to sincere thanks to them all.

## Clarification Received on Food Labelling

As longstanding HUSH members will be aware, over the past two and a half years the charity has been investigating the labelling of unpasteurised cheese sold in supermarkets across the country. We are specifically concerned about the potential health problems, particularly to the old, young and immuno-compromised, caused by E.coli O157.

HUSH was advised by Melanie Johnstone, the Minister for Public Health in 2003, that the labelling of unpasteurised cheese is included in the guidance notes to the Food Labelling Regulations, although this guidance is essentially voluntary. However, the charity was concerned that there appeared to be a discrepancy in the Food Standards Agency's understanding of the present EU requirements. Clarification has now been received from the European Commission indicating that current regulations require that raw milk products be labelled as such at the point of sale to the consumer. This would ensure that consumers were able to make an informed choice.

Commencing on 1st January 2006, a new EU regulation will replace the existing directive. It clearly states that the labelling of raw milk products will have to show the words "**made with raw milk**". As this latter directive regulates the labelling of foodstuffs to be delivered to the ultimate consumer, the requirement will clearly apply at the point of sale to the customer.

The correspondence from Mr Poudelet at the European Commission in Brussels has now been passed on to the relevant departments and we await their comments on how this will be implemented.

