

HUSH NEWSLETTER

LEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST HUSH FOOT ORS

A busy time for HUSH as cases soar

The HUSH telephone has been ringing almost continuously over the past couple of months as a result of not one outbreak ... but four.

Childrens' nurseries have been linked to three of the outbreaks—two in Scotland and one in South Wales. Five young children from the Care Share Nursery in Dunfermline required hospital treatment in Glasgow after they developed HUS (Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome) as a result of a rare strain of E.coli O157. The remaining 9 cases recovered at home and one result is still outstanding. A spokesman at Health Protection Scotland indicated the particular strain of O157 had been seen in Europe and Australia but was rare in the UK. In addition to the Dunfermline outbreak the strain has also been linked to four other single cases in Scotland and four cases in England, where one child died.

Two children tested positive at Inch in Aberdeenshire but this is not thought to be linked in any way to the Dunfermline outbreak.

All affected nurseries closed to allow investigation and thorough cleaning. Food, water and environmental samples tested negative and it is believed the infections were brought into the nurseries and transmitted by person-to-person contact.

A butcher's shop in the village of Law (*near the scene of the country's largest outbreak in Wishaw at the end of 1996*) also closed voluntarily when 4 cases were identified with links to the shop. An investigation took place and the Outbreak Control Team are satisfied that proper systems are in place and that all appropriate measures have been taken to protect public health. A local food takeaway has also just closed following the OCT investigation and areas of concern with food hygiene practices were identified.

School support for charity

After a pupil at New Close School in Warminster suffered from E.coli O157 last year, all the children have been learning more about germs.

Using the special light boxes featured in the previous HUSH newsletter, the children have found out how easily germs get on the hands and the importance of thorough handwashing.

The school held a "non uniform Friday" recently and raised £198 which they have sent to HUSH.



Photograph courtesy of Warminster Journal

Research shows E.coli O157 is spreading

Researchers at Glasgow University, the Scottish Agricultural College in Inverness, Edinburgh University and Strathclyde University tested dung samples from around 950 herds across Scotland and found 213 tested positive for E.coli O157.

Experts say that once a cow is infected, the bacteria can spread quickly within a herd, contaminating grazing meadows, streams and farmyards. The bacteria is now more widespread than was previously thought and there are few areas with no infected herds.

Dr Dominic Mellor, one of the researchers from Glasgow University's faculty of veterinary medicine says "*E.coli is now very wide-spread across Scotland and unfortunately there is very little we can do to eradicate it from cattle. The potential risk to the public is always going to be there and the only way to reduce it is to pay careful attention to hygiene.*"

Children under four years of age are always more susceptible to this type of infection and particular care needs to be taken by families

Latest on HUS Enhanced Surveillance

In 2003 Health Protection Scotland (HPS) or the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health (SCIEH) as it was known at that time, secured funding to start enhanced surveillance of all Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome cases in Scotland. It was not considered worthwhile extending this throughout the rest of the UK, as Scotland would be seen as representative.

Since then there have been 108 cases of HUS and TTP – 34 in 2003, 35 in 2004 and 39 in 2005. Of this total there were 72 cases of HUS and 36 cases of TTP, which resulted in 8 deaths.

- E.coli was diagnosed in 63 of the 72 cases of HUS and in 1 of the 36 cases of TTP.
- 34 of the 63 E.coli linked cases of HUS were not linked to any source of infection.
- 18/63 cases reported farm contact
- 6/63 reported person-to-person spread
- 3 reported food as a source of infection
- 1 report of environmental contamination (beach)
- 1 report of private water supply

Symptoms before HUS development were as follows:

- 84% diarrhoea
- 70% bloody diarrhoea
- 63% vomiting
- 63% abdominal pain
- 31% fever
- 4% neurological
- 3% cardiomyopathy

Of all 108 cases of HUS and TTP the initial prognosis is as follows:

- 76 made a "full recovery"
- 19 patients had renal impairment—10 of these were dialysis dependent
- 8 patients died

When asked how the illness affected them, sufferers and their families responded :

- 81% felt hospital information was helpful/sufficient
- Stress and psychological trauma was experienced
 - 47% of relatives felt that the episode had affected their health
- Paranoia over re-infection
- "No quality of life"; "Mentally and physically exhausted"; "Have aged 10 years"
- "Clinical depression resulted in giving up work"
- "Environmental Health suggested secrecy and family felt unable to discuss illness—this added to stress on family"
- "NHS 24 doesn't work".

In conclusion, Dr Kevin Pollock of HPS states "The severity of illness and psychological impact upon the family is devastating".