

# HUSH NEWSLETTER

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## Public Enquiry into 2005 E.coli Outbreak in Wales

Prof Hugh Pennington has published the report of the Public Inquiry into the South Wales Outbreak of E.coli O157 in September 2005, commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government.

### **What went wrong:**

Prof Pennington states that the Outbreak occurred because of food hygiene failures at the premises of John Tudor & Son. The proprietor, William Tudor, failed to ensure that critical procedures, such as cleaning and the separation of raw and cooked meats, were carried out effectively. Mr Tudor also falsified certain records and lied to Environmental Health Officers (EHOs).

However, EHOs from Bridgend did not assess or monitor the business's management of food safety as well as they could, or should, have done. Clues were missed. Those that were spotted were lost in the system because there was no way of alerting other EHOs to issues or concerns for subsequent inspections

On the balance of probability, the E.coli O157 that caused the Outbreak came from meat supplied by J.E. Tudor & Sons Ltd. Over a prolonged period, the Meat Hygiene Service failed to perform effectively its overall enforcement function in relation to the Abattoir. Despite knowledge of longstanding, repetitive failures, the Abattoir was allowed to continue functioning without significant improvement and in breach of legislative requirements. As a result, the risks of unsafe food being produced and supplied into the food chain were considerably higher than they should have been.

The path to infection for the majority of cases in the Outbreak was contaminated cold cooked meat that had been supplied for school meals. Schools were supplied with meats by John Tudor & Son under a contract with the Rhondda Cynon Taf, Bridgend, Caerphilly and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Councils. The arrangements for the joint contract were inadequate, with a particular lack of clear and agreed roles and responsibilities between the organisations and key individuals. In addition, the system for monitoring was not operated properly and the system for recording complaints was seriously flawed.

Lessons from the shocking events in Scotland (Wishaw) in 1996 (*when 20 people died and almost 500 were infected with E.coli O157*) should have stayed in people's minds, but 10 years after leading a review into that outbreak, Prof Pennington found himself looking at issues that were, disappointingly, all too familiar. A comparison of the failures that led to the South Wales Outbreak with those in Scotland show that some lessons have either not been learned or perhaps been learned and forgotten over time.

### **Recommendations:**

Prof Pennington made 24 recommendations (*key ones below*), which can be found in the full and summary reports at: <http://wales.gov.uk/ecoliinquiry/report/?jsessionid=4njVJCSRnkBmXhyRnrWthkQJJQh3p2h7HkQ4T6JRqjRlchpnntRI-1868201774?lang=en>

- ◆ Additional resources to be made available to ensure that all food businesses in Wales understand and use the HACCP approach and have in place an effective food safety management system that is embedded in their working practice. Food businesses are responsible for producing safe food.
- ◆ Improve inspection practices and include unannounced visits and discussion with employees. Issues and concerns must be logged so that they are not lost when inspections are undertaken by different officers.

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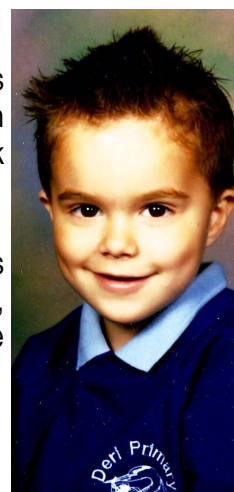
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- ◆ Regulatory and enforcement bodies should keep the choice of "light touch" enforcement for individual businesses under constant review. "Light touch" enforcement based purely on the size of a business is wrong.
  - ◆ All businesses contracting with public bodies for the supply of high-risk foods such as raw and cooked meats must be subject to independent food hygiene audits.

The recommendations will take time to implement, some longer than others, and Prof Pennington asked the National Assembly for Wales to monitor and report progress on implementation.

The Inquiry was limited to 4 local authorities, but the issues raised are as relevant to the other 18 authorities in Wales. Therefore, all are asked to review their policies, procedures and systems against issues raised in the report. The Welsh Assembly Government and the Food Standards Agency, working with the local authorities and other interested parties, should co-ordinate the reviews to ensure a uniform approach and standard of review. Local authorities should make public the results of the reviews and details of any action that needs to be taken. They should consider not only weaknesses and failures identified in the report, but also what worked well.

Mindful of the need for further development and to ensure lessons learned are not forgotten, it is recommended that a substantial review of food hygiene enforcement in Wales should take place in approximately 5 years time. This will help ensure that the lessons to emerge from the Outbreak are not forgotten.

This outbreak was the largest of its type in Wales and the second largest in the UK. 157 cases were identified, mainly school children. It resulted in very serious illness for some people and, tragically, the death of 5 year old Mason Jones. It is owed to the memory of Mason that the lessons from this Outbreak are learned and remembered.



Mason Jones

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## Thank you ....

- ◆ To staff from the Public Health Services Team of Dumfries and Galloway Council who held a charity lunch in April and raised **£231** for HUSH. Eating and raising money for the charity—what a wonderful combination!

- ◆ To everyone who generously sponsored my participation in the recent Edinburgh Marathon. On one of the hottest days in the year, I was delighted to finish in 4:33 hours. After Gift Aid was added to the donations made via the Justgiving website, the terrific sum of **£1015.26** was raised for HUSH.

Thanks again—*Ishbel Mackinnon—HUSH Co-ordinator*



*Not an oxygen mask in sight!*

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***HUSH, PO Box 159, Hayes, Middlesex, UB4 8XE***

*Donations can be sent to above address or made via a secure internet site—[www.justgiving.com/hush/donate/](http://www.justgiving.com/hush/donate/)  
(UK Taxpayers will be able to boost their donations by 28% at no extra cost to themselves on the website)*

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