

Report on *E coli* outbreak recommends review of guidance

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

A report into an outbreak of *Escherichia coli* 0157 in south Wales last year, in which one child died and 33 people needed hospital treatment, has made a range of recommendations aimed at preventing a recurrence. The recommendations include a call for the review of guidance to businesses that handle meat.

The review of the outbreak, which was carried out by the acting chief medical officer for Wales, David Salter, assessed the relevant systems and processes in place before and during the outbreak. The report, which was published last week, called on the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA), which is responsible for aspects of public health related to food, to review whether additional guidance on food safety should be given to businesses

that handle raw and cooked meats.

"In view of the continuing incidents of *E coli* 0157 in premises handling raw and cooked meats it must be asked whether existing guidance to the food industry is sufficient, and whether it could be improved," says the report. It asks whether the appropriate food hygiene legislation was correctly applied by the local authority to the meat business premises, whether existing food safety legislation was adequate to enable the local authority effectively to control the operations at those premises, and whether designation as a meat products plant would have provided alternative controls.

It was also told to reappraise its advice to local authorities on how often they should inspect

premises under their control. In addition, the report asked the agency to review its current auditing regime of local authorities in Wales. The report warned: "It appears that local authorities have only been audited once since the FSA was established in April 2000. The FSA may wish to consider if this is adequate to achieve the audit's objectives."

Local authorities were asked to review school cleaning, particularly in relation to toilets and pupils' access to soap and water, after criticism during the outbreak of standards of hygiene and sanitary provision in some schools. Local authorities were also asked to review how they could work with the FSA to introduce any new measures that are needed to improve food hygiene and to assess whether they have enough staff to deal with an outbreak of food poisoning or infection.

The report said that the National Public Health Service for Wales and the country's outbreak control team should consider

alternative forms of communicating with the public other than through the media. Finally, the report recommended that the Welsh Assembly set up a steering group to ensure that all of its recommendations are implemented. The health minister for Wales, Brian Gibbons, said: "It is important that all organisations identified in the report take on board the recommendations and take steps to implement them as soon as possible."

The *E coli* outbreak reviewed by the report was the largest ever to occur in Wales and the second largest in the United Kingdom, with 158 cases across 42 schools. About 65% of the cases were primary infections transmitted from the original source. A business in Bridgend, in south Wales, was identified as the meat supplier to schools attended by the affected children. □

South Wales E Coli 0157 Outbreak – September 2005 is available at www.cmo.wales.gov.uk/content/publications/reports/index-e.htm.

Rains fail to bring relief in Zimbabwe

Peter Moszynski *London*

Recent heavy rainfall across much of southern Africa has brought little respite to millions of people facing chronic food shortages caused by years of drought. Cases of cholera and anthrax have increased in the wake of widespread flooding, and the region's health systems are struggling to cope.

Particularly badly affected is Zimbabwe. A statement issued on 6 January by the International Federation of the Red Cross warned: "The cholera outbreak in southeastern Zimbabwe that began just days before Christmas has so far claimed at least seven lives in yet another example of mounting humanitarian problems in the southern African country."

The federation said that cholera had been almost eradicated in the area, "but the disease is on the resurgence, alongside malnutrition-related illnesses such as kwashiorkor." The federation attributes the re-emergence of the

disease to what it describes as the country's "crumbling health system and social infrastructure following six years of severe economic recession."

It said, "Collapsing drinking water and sewer reticulation systems have raised the risk of cholera and typhoid outbreaks while long running food shortages have seen a rise in malnutrition."

The World Food Programme estimates that four million of the 12 million population will need emergency food aid this year.

The Red Cross pointed out that the Apostolic Faith religious group predominated in the area most affected by cholera. The group's followers do not believe in medical treatment. "A combination of shortages of drugs and the fact that some of the people in Buhera who were infected with the disease simply chose not to go for treatment might have contributed to the high number of deaths. With the death toll at seven within one village, it is feared that without an effective and rapid response the outbreak will become an epidemic."

A federation spokesman said that it was concerned at reports of an outbreak of anthrax in the Masasa area that has killed a number of cattle and one person.



Art for health's sake

The sculptor Kate Munro has created these shimmering stainless steel sculptures in an internal courtyard at Fromeside medium secure unit in south Gloucestershire. The figures move according to the weather and light conditions. It is one of six works of art that are part of the £0.5m (\$0.9m; €0.7m) Moving On project, which was set up to enhance the new mental health facilities being developed by the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust. The Fromeside unit is clinician designed, and service users took part in workshops run by the artists involved in the scheme.

Lynn Eaton *London*

So far 25 cases in humans and 39 in animals have been reported.

Alarmed by Harare's lack of cooperation with humanitarian operations, some agencies are beginning to speak out. The Irish

charity Trócaire warned: "Zimbabwe, once known as the breadbasket of Africa, is badly affected—a result of deepening poverty caused by economic mismanagement." □