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Opinion on Outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* Febrile Gastroenteritis in Italy 2016

By Dr Lucia Anelich

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Researchers in Italy have recently published their findings on the febrile gastroenteritis outbreak due to *Listeria monocytogenes* that occurred in Italy in 2016. The full publication is available as an attachment accompanying this letter, but I provide a summary of findings below together with some comments, for your information and quick reference.

The outbreak in 2016 resulted in **febrile gastro-enteritis**, which is the mild form of the illness and normally affects healthy individuals. In this form of the illness, symptoms can appear within hours, sometimes as soon as 6 hours or as late as 10 days after consuming the contaminated food. Most often however, symptoms appear after 24 h. There were hundreds of cases, but no deaths occurred considering that it wasn't the invasive, more severe form, which is given the name "listeriosis".

Some interesting facts emerge: the reported levels found were **in excess** of 15 000 colony forming units per gram (cfu/g). Unfortunately the researchers did not perform any dilutions further than what was needed to comply with European legislation, so they could only count up to 15 000 cfu/gr. This is indeed a pity as further dilutions would have enabled them to obtain more exact counts. This information would have been of tremendous value to the food safety community world-wide, considering that we know high levels are needed to cause disease, but don't know exactly what those numbers are (infectious dosage). These results do however indicate that levels higher than 15 000 cfu/gr caused illness in this outbreak amongst children involved aged between 3-10 years. Levels of the organism required to cause febrile gastroenteritis are suggested to be **in excess of 10⁵ cfu/g**.

Whole Genome Sequencing showed ST5 and ST11 strains. Listeriosis has been a notifiable disease in Italy since 1993!

Further information resources:

1. This communiqué and further information can be found on the Anelich Consulting website at www.anelichconsulting.co.za and by clicking on links provided;
2. See <http://anelichconsulting.co.za/index.php/faq> for regularly updated answers to Frequently Asked Questions.
3. See www.listeriosisfacts.co.za, a website launched in March 2018 by Anelich Consulting specifically designed to provide science-based facts on listeriosis and food safety in general for the consumer.

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Two New Courses

Listeria monocytogenes – what you need to know to control it in your processing plant, establish an environmental monitoring programme based on risk as well as how to establish appropriate microbiological criteria accompanied by statistically-based sampling plans. Shorter presentations are available for top management.

Understanding Microbiological Criteria and Associated Sampling Plans. The National Department of Health is busy revising R692, the regulations related to Microbiological Standards for Foods. The revised regulations will be written in the modern way i.e. using microbiological criteria (MC) with sampling plans. This course explains fully what MC and sampling plans are, how they are developed, how they are interpreted, including all related concepts. The International Commission on the Microbiological Specifications for Foods (ICMSF) have developed MC since the 1980s and Dr Anelich, being the only South African member of this group of international food safety specialists, brings this wealth of experience to this course, unique in SA.

Click [here](#) or contact la@anelichconsulting.co.za for more information.
