

## RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 11

meeting date: 19 OCTOBER 2017  
title: FOOD SAFETY. RAW MILK SURVEY  
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
principal author: HEATHER BARTON, HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Committee of the emerging health risk associated with an increase in the sale and consumption of unpasteurised “raw” milk in the Ribble Valley.
- 1.2 To inform Committee of the work carried out this year by the Food Safety Team to identify suppliers of raw cows drinking milk (RCDM) who are failing to ensure that their product meets the microbiological criteria for raw milk and is free from disease causing bacteria.
- 1.3 Relevance to the Council’s ambitions and priorities
  - Community Objectives – To promote and support health, environmental, economic and social well-being of people who live, work and visit the Ribble Valley.
  - Corporate Priorities – To promote healthier environment and lifestyle.

### 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Most milk and cream is pasteurised. Pasteurisation is a process of heat treatment intended to kill bacteria and prevent food poisoning. If milk is unpasteurised, it is often called raw milk. Unpasteurised or ‘raw’ milk and ‘raw’ cream may contain harmful bacteria that cause food poisoning, including *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* and *Escherichia coli*. Infants and children are specifically advised not to consume unpasteurised milk and cream as they are particularly vulnerable to food poisoning. *Escherichia coli* (*E.coli*) in particular, has the potential to cause severe, life threatening illness in young children.
- 2.2 The majority of raw drinking milk produced and sold in the UK is from cows. The sale of RCDM in England is on the increase due to the perceived health benefits and it is increasingly being sold via the internet and through vending machines.
- 2.3 In the past 12 months there has been an increase from 1 producer/retailer of RCDM in the Ribble Valley to 4.
- 2.4 Enforcement of food law at these premises is split between this Authority and the Food Standards Agency.
- 2.5 There is currently limited baseline data on the frequency of foodborne outbreaks associated with the consumption of raw drinking milk.

- 2.6 A previous study of unpasteurised cows' milk, carried out by the Public Health Laboratory Service in 1996/1997, showed that 41 of 1097 samples (3.7%) were contaminated with potentially pathogenic bacteria (including *Salmonella* in 5 samples, *Campylobacter* in 19 samples and *E. coli* O157 in 3).
- 2.7 Routine testing of 274 raw milk samples supplied by Local Authorities or the Dairy Hygiene Inspectorate to Public Health England laboratories in 2013 and 2014 indicated the presence of *Listeria* species in 10% of samples and borderline levels of coagulase positive staphylococci (between 100 and 10,000 cfu/ml) in 31% of samples, but pathogens (*Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* and *E. coli* O157) were not detected in any samples except from a single farm associated with an outbreak investigation (*Salmonella* was detected in three bulk milk samples from this premises).
- 2.8 A recent outbreak of *Campylobacter* has been associated with raw milk sold from an on-farm vending machine near Kendal with 12 confirmed and 53 probable cases. It is important to note that the farm was testing in accordance with The Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013 (as amended) which specifies testing for aerobic colony count and coliforms only. Samples that had been tested had been deemed satisfactory as they met the requirements of these test parameters. However, *Campylobacter* was present and the tests carried out didn't provide evidence that these samples actually presented a risk.
- 2.9 In response to a number of cases of *E. coli* O157 potentially associated with the consumption of raw milk the FSA recommends that children and vulnerable people do not consume milk that has not been heat-treated. It is a legal requirement for farms to label milk with a health warning and display notices when the milk is sold outside of the packaging (e.g. in café's). In the recent *Campylobacter* outbreak in the North West, poor labelling was highlighted.

### 3 ISSUES

- 3.1 All four of the producers in the Ribble Valley have had unannounced samples taken from them by the Environmental Health Section.
- One of the producers was found to have *Campylobacter* in the milk and 4 cases of food poisoning were linked to these premises.
  - One of the producers was found to have *Salmonella dublin* in the milk. This was directly linked to an infant case of salmonellosis.
  - One of the producers was found to have Shiga toxin producing *E.coli* in the milk. We are unaware of any illness associated with this incident.
  - One of the producers had coliform levels above the legal maximum limit.

In all incidents the Food Standards Agency made sure that the premises ceased the production of RCDM until a joint investigation and enhanced sampling took place.

As of this date three of the producers remain closed.

- 3.2 Worryingly the investigations revealed that two local nurseries and a local primary school had been supplying RCDM to their children. This prompted Public Health England and Lancashire County Council to write to all schools and nurseries warning of the health risks associated with RCDM (Appendix 1).

## **4 RISK ASSESSMENT**

### **4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:**

- Resources – There are no immediate implications but Committee is asked to recognise the ongoing demands on the service.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – There may be legal implications should there be fatalities or serious injury linked to the consumption of RCDM. This authority has a statutory duty to ensure that food supplied in its district is safe to consume.
- Political – There may be political implications should there be fatalities or serious injury linked to the consumption of RCDM
- Reputation – There may be implications for the Authority's reputation should there be fatalities or serious injury linked to the consumption of RCDM.
- Equality & Diversity – No implications identified.

## **5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

- 5.1 Acknowledge the increase in the sale of RCDM in the Ribble Valley, and the potential health risks that this can pose to our residents.
- 5.2 Support the continued focus on this high risk food sector.

HEATHER BARTON  
HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

MARSHAL SCOTT  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Appendix 1 - Letter to schools and nurseries warning of the health risks associated with RCDM

For further information please ask for Heather Coar, extension 4466.



Public Health  
England



Local Health Protection Team

Tel: 0344 225 0562 - Option 2

[www.gov.uk/phe](http://www.gov.uk/phe)

Lancashire County Council

[www.lancashire.gov.uk](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk)

Dear Childcare Provider,

**RE: Unpasteurised Milk**

We are writing to you to provide information on an issue that has come to our attention regarding the consumption of unpasteurised raw milk by young children and to remind you that schools, nurseries and childminders are prohibited from providing raw milk to young children within their care irrespective of whether parental consent has been provided. This is due to the risks associated with the consumption of raw milk, particularly for vulnerable groups such as young children.

Public Health England, the Food Standards Agency and the local authority have been following up cases of food poisoning across Cumbria & Lancashire, the likely cause of which in a number of cases has been the consumption of unpasteurised raw milk. We have also identified several instances where local childminders, nurseries and schools have provided unpasteurised raw milk directly to the children in their care, either as a regular part of their day, or following visits to farms that may provide raw milk.

Legislation states that raw milk may only be sold directly to consumers by registered milk production holdings authorised to produce and sell raw milk. Schools, nurseries and childminders are reminded that they are prohibited from providing raw milk to children within their care, irrespective of whether parental consent has been provided.

Most milk and cream sold and consumed in UK is pasteurised. Pasteurisation is a process of heat treatment intended to kill bacteria and prevent food poisoning. If milk is unpasteurised, it is often called raw milk. Unpasteurised or 'raw' milk and 'raw' cream may contain harmful bacteria that cause food poisoning, including *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* and *Escherichia coli*.

Infants and children are specifically advised not to consume unpasteurised milk and cream as they are particularly vulnerable to food poisoning<sup>i,ii</sup>. *Escherichia coli* in particular has the potential to cause severe, life threatening illness in young children<sup>iii</sup>.

While it is important for children to understand where their food comes from, and outdoor activities & visits to farms can contribute to this, teachers and carers need to be aware of the risks and measures they need to take to minimise them.<sup>iv</sup>

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact the health protection team on the number above.

Yours Sincerely,



Mark McGivern  
Consultant in Health Protection  
Public Health England



Dr Sakthi Karunanithi MD MPH FFPH  
Director of Public Health and Wellbeing  
Lancashire County Council

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<sup>i</sup> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.2903/j.efsa.2015.3940/abstract>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/farmingfood/dairy-guidance/rawmilkcream>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/vero-cytotoxin-producing-escherichia-coli-vtec-guidance-data-and-analysis>

<sup>iv</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/322846/Farm\\_visits\\_avoiding\\_infection.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/322846/Farm_visits_avoiding_infection.pdf)