



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
HEALTH AND CONSUMERS DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Deputy Director General for the Food Chain

Brussels,  
SANCO G4/KK/js (2011)

Dear Ms Geslain-Lanéelle,

**Subject: Request for urgent scientific and technical assistance on the possible risks for public health from surface and internal contamination of vegetables with E. coli serotype O104**

An increase in the number of human cases of Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS) was reported by Germany to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) on 22 May 2011. Since then, the Commission has been following closely this outbreak caused by Shiga-toxin producing *Escherichia coli*- bacteria (STEC), serotype O104/H4. The STEC outbreak is already responsible for several fatalities in Germany. Other Member States (UK, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and France) have reported human cases as well. All these were associated with travel in Germany.

The epidemiological investigations carried out by German authorities seem to link the current outbreak with raw vegetables. The strain identified in this outbreak had previously not been associated so far with significant health problems in the EU and seems to have a different epidemiology than STEC causing human disease so far in the EU.

Taking into account the characteristics of this new strain STEC O104/H4, questions could be raised on the potential initial source contamination of the food chain and possible resulting food safety risks.

Ms Geslain-Lanéelle  
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Therefore, in accordance with Article 31 of Regulation (EC) No 178/2002, the European Commission asks the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to provide by **within 3 working days following the receipt of this request** scientific assistance and urgent advice on the following questions related to the current outbreak caused by STEC:

1- What is the relative exposure of humans by

- *surface contamination of vegetables;*
- *internal contamination of vegetables;*
- *routine handling steps such as processing, packaging and distribution in the possible contamination of vegetables;*

2- Given the identified risk, to recommend risk mitigation options.

My services remain at your disposal for further information. On this matter, you can contact Mr Klaus Kostenzer, who is responsible for this dossier with regard to legislation and Ms S. Osaer, who is the relevant contact point in the unit Relations with Agencies and Advisory Groups. Their respective phone and e-mail addresses are indicated below.

Yours sincerely,

Ladislav Miko

Contact:

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