

US to test beef for six kinds of E.coli bacteria

September 13 2011

The US government said Tuesday it will begin testing next year for six more kinds of E.coli bacteria in raw ground beef and tenderized steaks in order to boost protection of US consumers.

The US currently tests for one strain of E.coli O157:H7 in [beef](#), but beginning in March 2012, if raw beef tests positive for E.coli serogroups O26, O103, O45, O111, O121 and O145, it will be banned from the market.

The six additional types of E.coli can survive in [meat](#) that is cooked to a pink center, and even very low doses can cause potentially fatal illnesses particularly in children and the elderly, the Department of Agriculture said.

"These organisms could survive in a hamburger that is not properly cooked," said USDA Undersecretary for [Food Safety](#) Elisabeth Hagen, noting that many Americans like to eat meat that is prepared medium rare.

About one in six Americans becomes sick from a food borne illnesses each year, an epidemic that kills about 3,000 annually and hospitalizes 128,000, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Too often, we are caught reacting to a problem instead of preventing it. This new policy will help stop problems before they start," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Asked by a reporter if the testing would apply to imported meat, Vilsack replied: "We will certainly work with our import partners to make sure they understand the importance of this."

The six strains are known as non-O157:H7 Shiga-toxin producing E.coli, and can cause a range of symptoms, from diarrhea to [kidney failure](#).

The Center for Science in the Public Interest said the new steps "will help prevent future outbreaks," at "reasonable" costs of "half a million dollars for the USDA and under five million for the entire \$155-billion US meat industry."

The [consumer advocacy group](#) also noted that the six new strains "have been linked to at least 10 outbreaks and nearly 700 illnesses since 1998."

However, the American Meat Institute, the largest US meat and poultry trade group, said there was no scientific basis for the change.

"USDA's declaration of six nSTEC (non-O157 Shiga toxin-producing E.coli) as adulterants in beef is neither warranted nor justified by the science," said a statement by AMI executive vice president James Hodges.

"USDA has drafted a paper detailing its reasoning because the agency admits it does not have the data needed to do a proper public health risk assessment," he said.

(c) 2011 AFP

Citation: US to test beef for six kinds of E.coli bacteria (2011, September 13) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-09-beef-kinds-ecoli-bacteria.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.