

Deli meats show signs of poor hygiene

May 26 2014, by Kate Bourne

Hygienic food handling and standard food safety protocols are not being practiced at many of Adelaide's supermarket delicatessens, according to a University of Adelaide study.

The research found that of 174 samples of various ready-to-eat deli meats bought in supermarket deli sections across the greater Adelaide area, 134 (77%) had bacterial levels that failed to meet [food](#) standards guidelines.

The study results will be presented on Wednesday at this week's Australian Veterinary Association Annual Conference at the Perth Convention Centre.

"Although no recognised food poisoning pathogens such as Escherichia coli or Salmonella species were found on these meats, the high bacterial count suggests that hygiene has been compromised," says Professor Michael Reichel, Professor of Veterinary Public Health in the School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences.

"Such out-of-control processes are also susceptible to contamination with serious [food poisoning](#) organisms."

The study was carried out last year by final-year (sixth-year) [veterinary](#) science students as part of their veterinary public health rotation. The randomly selected supermarkets are not identified.

Sliced salami, fritz and roast pork showed the highest proportions of

unsatisfactory bacterial counts. Ham and chicken meats had lower levels of bacteria, but two-thirds of those samples still failed to meet satisfactory standards.

Some samples (15.5%) showed the presence of coliform bacteria – which may be evidence of faecal contamination. Some samples had total bacterial counts of more than 108 or 100 million per gram – representing "overt spoilage", says Professor Reichel.

"The presence of coliform would indicate really poor hygiene such as people not washing their hands after going to the toilet," he says. "These levels of bacterial counts tell us that storage conditions, product handling and turnover should all be investigated."

Professor Reichel says there is also an issue of quality as well as [food safety](#).

"Ready-to-eat deli meats are consumed daily by up to half of Australia's population," he says. "People have a right to expect that the product they buy on the weekend should last through the following week, not go slimy in a couple of days."

Professor Reichel says supermarkets and retailers needed to take a hard look at their processes and staff compliance. And more microbiological testing – by the retailers themselves – would help ensure proper processes were adhered to.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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