

Outbreak of Hepatitis A infections in Denmark linked to frozen berries

Sat, 2013-03-16

Alert details

Authorities in Denmark are currently investigating a nationwide outbreak of Hepatitis A infections involving a total of 30 laboratory confirmed cases. Disease onset dates range from mid-November 2012 to 26 February 2013. Most cases have onset dates within the last couple of months. The patients have not traveled to endemic areas and do not belong to known groups at increased risk. The age range of patients includes children and adults. Viruses from 7 cases have been further characterized and all found to belong to genogroup 1B and have identical nucleotide sequence.

After conducting trawling interviews, authorities in Denmark conducted a case-control study which strongly suggests that the vehicle is frozen berries purchased in Danish retail shops. The case-control study included a total of 25 cases and 50 matched controls and showed significant associations with consumption of smoothies as well as several types of frozen berries (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, assorted berries). The highest OR was found in the analysis of exposure to frozen strawberries: Matched OR 15.8 (95% CI 3.6-67); 20 of 25 cases reported consumption of strawberries. 18 of the cases had consumed smoothies (OR 12.5, 95% CI 2.8-55). Several cases have been hospitalized and no deaths have been reported to date.

The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration has initiated a large-scale traceback investigation and are in close contact with both retail chains and importers of berries to the Danish market. Information from these investigations will be compared with information obtained by tracing individual credit card transactions from a limited number of patients which will provide their exact purchases from different retailers of frozen berries and products. Patients have also been asked if frozen berries were still available in their homes for sampling. Analysis will be performed on these samples as soon as Danish Authorities can narrow the suspected products and batches.

The Danish Food Authority has already communicated to the Danish public that all frozen berries should be heat treated prior to consumption.

Given the exact source of this outbreak is not yet identified and product could still be on the market, the INFOSAN Secretariat encourages INFOSAN members to ensure active follow-up of Hepatitis A cases that would be considered unusual (i.e. locally acquired in places with low rates). We wish to emphasize that increases in cases may not be observed and thus sequencing of the virus may be required to compare to the outbreak strains. In addition, epidemiological investigation of hepatitis A cases should include questions on consumption of frozen berries.

Distribution of frozen berries is often international. If you identify any cases associated with this outbreak please share that information with the INFOSAN Secretariat (emergencyinfosan@who.int) and the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Points in Denmark, Ms Tenna Jensen (foedevareberedskab@fvst.dk) and Mr Kim Sigsgaard (kiva@fvst.dk).

Hazard:

Countries: Denmark

- Virus › Hepatitis A

Food category: Fruit and fruit products

Food involved: Frozen berries

WHO regions: European Region

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