

## Communicable Disease Report

### Brucellosis associated with unpasteurised milk products abroad

Two cases of acute brucellosis in members of a family who stayed in Malta during April 1995 have been reported recently to the PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC). They developed minor non-specific symptoms and intermittent fever in early June and were admitted to hospital in England in late July. *Brucella melitensis* was cultured from the blood of one case; serological tests were weakly positive for the other. They both ate 'Gbejniet' (a locally produced cheese pastry) during their stay in Malta.

An outbreak of brucellosis in Malta was first identified in March 1995. The Department of Public Health in Malta, reported 135 cases (1 death) between 1 January and 26 July. Twenty one cases were notified from 1992 to 1994. The outbreak has been linked to the consumption of a soft cheese made from unpasteurised milk from sheep and goats. The department issued a public warning advising against the consumption of this cheese, which was withdrawn from sale and destroyed. Malta has an active policy of slaughtering affected herds and the herds associated with the outbreak have been identified and slaughtered.

A total of nine human cases of brucellosis in England and Wales in 1995 have been reported to CDSC. *B. melitensis* was isolated from five cases and the others were identified serologically. Six cases were known to be associated with travel; the two from Malta described above, three who had been to Spain, and one from Egypt, and all six had consumed goats' milk and/or cheese.

CDSC received 44 laboratory reports of human brucella infections from 1992 to 1994 (16 in 1992, 7 in 1993, 21 in 1994). Nine of these were due to *B. melitensis* and the others were associated with *B. abortus* or *Brucella sp.* Twenty two cases were reported to have been acquired abroad; three in Spain, two in Portugal, and one each in France, Italy, Greece, Bosnia, Turkey, Egypt/Israel, Jordan, Qatar, Oman, Pakistan, Somalia, and Tanzania; in four cases the countries were not reported. Some of the remaining 22 cases may have acquired infection abroad.

Brucellosis is a zoonosis. It occurs in farmers, farm workers and veterinary surgeons who have close contact with infected animals or their products. Other people may be infected through the ingestion of raw milk products from infected animals. The incubation period is usually two or three weeks (ranging from one week to several months) and onset is insidious, with malaise, headache, night sweats, and weakness. Chronic brucellosis is associated with fatigue, myalgia, fever, and depression, and can persist for months.

Brucellosis due to *B. melitensis* has never been reported in animals in Great Britain. An outbreak of brucellosis due to *B. abortus* occurred in 1993, due to imported infected cattle. This was eliminated by slaughter of infected cattle and tracing of contacts.

There are very few reports of indigenously acquired human cases of brucellosis in Great Britain because almost all milk is pasteurised and the programme to eradicate bovine brucellosis has been successful. Most cases are chronic infections acquired at work. Acute imported human infections continue to be reported, often associated with the consumption of raw milk or cheese. Brucellosis may not be considered early in the course of the disease and diagnosis may therefore be delayed. Other people who have visited Malta in the past few months may have been exposed to *B. melitensis* before the implicated cheese was withdrawn. CDSC would welcome information about suspected cases.

**Salmonella infections:**  
monthly report

**Other food poisoning:**  
monthly report

**Gastrointestinal virus infections:**  
weeks 95/28 - 31

**Other gastrointestinal tract infections:**  
weeks 95/28 - 31

**Bacteraemia and bacterial meningitis:**  
weeks 95/28 - 31



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