

FOOD POISONING OUTBREAK

Listeria Monocytogenes

Soft Ripened Cheese, Switzerland

What Happened?

Following a 1985 Listeriosis outbreak in Californian Mexican-style cheese, Swiss officials initiated a survey for Listeria organisms in dairy products. As a result, 20 samples of Vacherin Mont d'Or cheese containing the Listeria organism were found. The positive samples were subsequently linked to a Listeriosis outbreak in which 122 individuals were infected between 1983 and 1987. The mortality rate was about 30%.

What Process Was Used?

"Listeria free" milk was coagulated then dipped into wooden hoops for draining. The drained cheese was transported in the wooden hoops, to one of 12 different cellars in Switzerland. The cheese was placed on wooden shelves and brushed daily with salt water. After three weeks the cheese was packaged for sale and the wooden hoops returned to the factory.

Where Did the Contamination Occur?

The survey tested many areas for the Listeria organism. The organism was detected in several areas including on the surface of the cheese, wooden shelves and on the brushes used to salt the cheese. Nearly one half of the twelve cellars were contaminated

How Was the Outbreak Controlled?

The cheese was recalled. All 40 factories and cellars were thoroughly cleaned and sanitized. All wood material, including shelves, boxes and hoops, were removed and replaced with easily

sanitized equipment. These procedures ended the outbreak.

How Can Such Incidents Be Prevented In The Future?

Dairy plant process workers and plant management must be made aware of the sensitivity of dairy products to potentially lethal contamination. Dairy plant process workers must be provided with sanitary equipment and effective programs for processing, cleaning and sanitation. The dairy plant licensee is responsible to ensure that such programs are being followed, and where necessary, adjusted to ensure that a safe and wholesome product is produced.

For further information contact the Dairy
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