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The European Union One Health 2024 Zoonoses Report

Background

- Zoonoses are infectious diseases that can spread between animals and humans due to bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites (zoonotic microorganisms).
- These microorganisms can infect people through contaminated food and water, contact with infected animals, vectors (e.g. mosquitoes, ticks) or a contaminated environment.
- Directive 2003/99/EC requires EFSA to examine zoonotic disease data from European Union (EU) Member States and prepare an annual report on the spread of diseases by zoonotic agents, in collaboration with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), which is responsible for the surveillance of communicable diseases in humans.
- These reports provide an overview of the occurrence of zoonotic agents in humans, food and animals, providing valuable information for veterinary and food safety authorities. They help them to plan activities aimed at reducing the presence of zoonotic diseases in animals and the environment, thereby lowering the number of human cases.

How did EFSA and ECDC carry out this work and what data were used?

- EFSA and ECDC used surveillance and monitoring data from the Member States on the occurrence of zoonotic diseases in humans, zoonotic agents in food, animals and the environment, and microbiological contaminants in food.
- The data were analysed to create summaries and identify trends, while considering data quality and sampling strategies for food and animals.

What were the most important outcomes?

- In 2024, the five most reported zoonoses in humans were:
  - campylobacteriosis, with 168,396 cases (55.3 cases per 100,000 people)
  - salmonellosis, with 79,703 cases (18.6 cases per 100,000 people)
  - Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) infections, with 11,738 cases (3.5 cases per 100,000 people)
  - listeriosis, with 3041 confirmed invasive human cases of *Listeria monocytogenes* (0.69 cases per 100,000 people)
  - echinococcosis, with 984 cases (0.22 cases per 100,000 people)
- The number of cases reported over the last five years showed a significant increase in brucellosis, campylobacteriosis, listeriosis, salmonellosis and infections caused by STEC. For listeriosis, the upward trend may reflect a combination of factors, including demographic changes and evolving dietary habits, while for STEC it relates to more sensitive testing. For the others, the rise mainly reflects pandemic-related disruptions in disease surveillance and reporting during the pandemic years.
- The number of food-borne outbreaks reported in 2024 (6558) increased by 14.5% compared to 2023, and so did the number of reported human cases (62,481) and hospitalisations (3336), which increased by 19.7% and 15.2%, respectively. Conversely, the number of deaths (53) decreased in 2024 by 18.5%.
- *Salmonella* spp., norovirus and *Campylobacter* were the most common identified causes of food-borne outbreaks in 2024. The number of outbreaks they caused increased compared to 2023.
- *Salmonella*, when paired with 'eggs and egg products', caused the highest number of outbreaks and hospitalisations, and ranked fourth in the number of cases in food-borne outbreaks. When paired with 'pig meat and products thereof' or 'vegetables and juices and other products thereof', *Salmonella* ranked among the top 10 in all pairs of causative agents and food vehicles. Norovirus and 'mixed foods' was the pair causing the highest number of cases.

- *Salmonella* was the causative agent most frequently reported in multi-country food-borne outbreaks.
- The number of countries meeting all established targets for reducing *Salmonella* in poultry populations decreased, with only 14 Member States reaching full compliance in 2024, compared to 15 in 2023 and 19 in 2022. Over the past 10 years, a significant increase in the EU-level prevalence of *Salmonella* spp. and target *Salmonella* serovar-positive flocks was observed in breeding *Gallus gallus* and breeding turkeys. For the latter poultry category, this upward trend was also seen over the last five years.
- The proportion of *Salmonella* spp.-positive samples and *Campylobacter* spp.-positive samples at the slaughterhouse was higher in official Member State inspection samplings than in food business operator inspection samples, exceeding the process hygiene limit of 1,000 CFU/g. (CFU stands for 'colony-forming unit' and is used to quantify the concentration of viable microorganisms in a sample).
- In 2024 *L. monocytogenes* was the zoonotic disease with the highest percentage of hospitalisations and deaths among outbreak cases (72.1% and 8.3%, respectively) and non-outbreak-related infections (97.3% and 15.6%, respectively). Statistics on positive *L. monocytogenes* samples indicated that the proportion of samples of ready-to-eat foods exceeding the food safety limit of 100 CFU/g was either zero or below 1% across all ready-to-eat food categories, except for 'products of meat origin, fermented sausages'. In this food category, the proportion of positive samples exceeding 100 CFU/g was 3.0%, a value much higher than in 2023.
- As regards zoonotic tuberculosis, 17 Member States had disease-free status in 2024. Ten Member States, along with Northern Ireland, were under an eradication programme or had areas that were. In these countries/regions, a slight overall increase in the number of positive herds had been observed over the previous five years.
- No human brucellosis outbreaks were reported in the EU in 2024. There were 22 Member States with disease-free status for brucellosis in cattle and 21 with disease-free status in sheep and goats, in addition to Northern Ireland, which was disease free for both animal populations. In zones under an eradication programme, the number of positive cattle herds remained stable. In sheep and goats, the prevalence of *Brucella*-positive flocks continued to decrease, reaching 0.04%.

What were the limitations/uncertainties?

- The main uncertainty concerned the comparability of certain data provided by some Member States (e.g. food-borne outbreaks, official control samples verifying the implementation of food safety criteria by food business operators, etc.).
- When the data were not comparable between Member States, extreme caution was used when interpreting results at EU level.

Disclaimer

- This plain language summary (PLS) is a simplified version of EFSA and ECDC's *European Union One Health 2024 Zoonoses Report*. The full scientific report can be found here.
- The purpose of the PLS is to enhance transparency and inform interested parties on EFSA and ECDC's work on the topic using simplified language to present a summary of the main findings.

Reference

The European Union One Health 2024 Zoonoses Report.
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