

# CONSISTENT INTERPRETATION

## FOOD STANDARDS SURVEILLANCE

To: Food Businesses

Title: Standard 1.6.1- New microbiological criteria for *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat (RTE) Foods

### **Purpose**

To provide information about the new criteria for *Listeria monocytogenes* (*L. monocytogenes*) in ready-to-eat (RTE) foods as listed in Standard 1.6.1 (Microbiological Limits in Foods) of the Food Standard Code (the code).

### **Background**

Standard 1.6.1 of the Code has been amended to include two sets of criteria for *L. monocytogenes* in RTE foods that are based on whether the food can support its growth or not:

Schedule					
Column1	Column2	Column3	Column4	Column5	Column6
Food	Microorganism/test	n	c	m	M
Ready-to-eat food in which the growth of <i>Listeria monocytogenes</i> will not occur	<i>Listeria monocytogenes</i>	5	0	100 cfu/g	NA
Ready-to-eat food in which the growth of will occur	<i>Listeria monocytogenes</i>	5	0	not detected in 25g	NA

n= min number of samples, c= maximum allowable defective samples  
m=acceptable microbiological level, M= maximum permissible level in any one sample

This replaces the previous version of the Standard which includes limits of *Listeria monocytogenes* in specific foods only.

RTE food for this bulletin means a food that is consumed in the same state in which it is sold and does not undergo any listericidal process before consumption. However it does not include shelf stable foods, whole raw fruits and vegetables, nuts in the shell and live bivalve molluscs.

## **Responsibility of RTE Food Producers**

It is the responsibility of your business producing RTE foods to establish whether your RTE food supports the growth of *Listeria*.

Standard 1.6.1 specifies that the growth of *Listeria monocytogenes* will not occur in a ready-to-eat food if :

- (a) the food has a pH less than 4.4 regardless of water activity; or
- (b) the food has a water activity less than 0.92 regardless of pH; or
- (c) the food has a pH less than 5.0 in combination with a water activity of less than 0.94; or
- (d) the food has a refrigerated shelf life of no greater than 5 days; or
- (e) the food is frozen (including foods consumed frozen and those intended to be thawed immediately before consumption); or
- (f) the level of *Listeria monocytogenes* will not increase by greater than 0.5 log cfu/g for at least the expected shelf life.

While it is the responsibility of the manufacturers or producers to establish if their RTE food products supports the growth of *L. monocytogenes* or not, this information must be readily available at retail outlets where their products are sold to the public. In the absence of information to verify that an RTE food does not support the growth of *Listeria*, it will be considered that your RTE food products do support the growth of *Listeria* and as a result, microbiological criteria of 'Not detected in 25 gm' will apply.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) has developed a guidance document. It provides detailed information on the factors affecting the growth of *L. monocytogenes* in a food product and production process, a decision framework and impact of shelf life on *Listeria* growth. It is available at the following web link.

<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/publications/Documents/Guidance%20on%20the%20application%20of%20limits%20for%20Listeria%20monocytogenes%20FINAL.pdf>

SA Health will carry out random sampling of RTE products to check compliance against *Listeria* criteria as specified in Standard 1.6.1. Where noncompliance is identified enforcement action will be taken.

### **Reference:**

FSANZ Website: - [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

Food Standard Code: <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/code/Pages/default.aspx>

For more information

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