

CHEMICAL FOOD SAFETY INCIDENTS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

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The Veterinary Laboratories Agency carries out the diagnosis and surveillance of food animal diseases in England and Wales.

The objective of the surveillance is to identify causes of contamination, investigate release and exposure and advise farmers and FSA on possible controls.

The Regional Laboratories of the VLA identify and investigate potential food safety incidents caused by exposure of food animals to chemicals on behalf of the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

There are a number of different ways in which livestock may be exposed to hazardous chemicals:

- presence of toxic plants or chemical contamination of pasture.
- accidental inclusion of toxic material in animal feedingstuffs.
- overdosage or misuse of a medicinal product.
- animals finding and ingesting excessive quantities of substances normally or occasionally found in their environment.
- exposure to contaminated water supplies.
- environmental contamination as a result of accidents, fires, floods, waste disposal and industrial pollution.

THE INVESTIGATION OF POTENTIAL FOOD SAFETY INCIDENTS

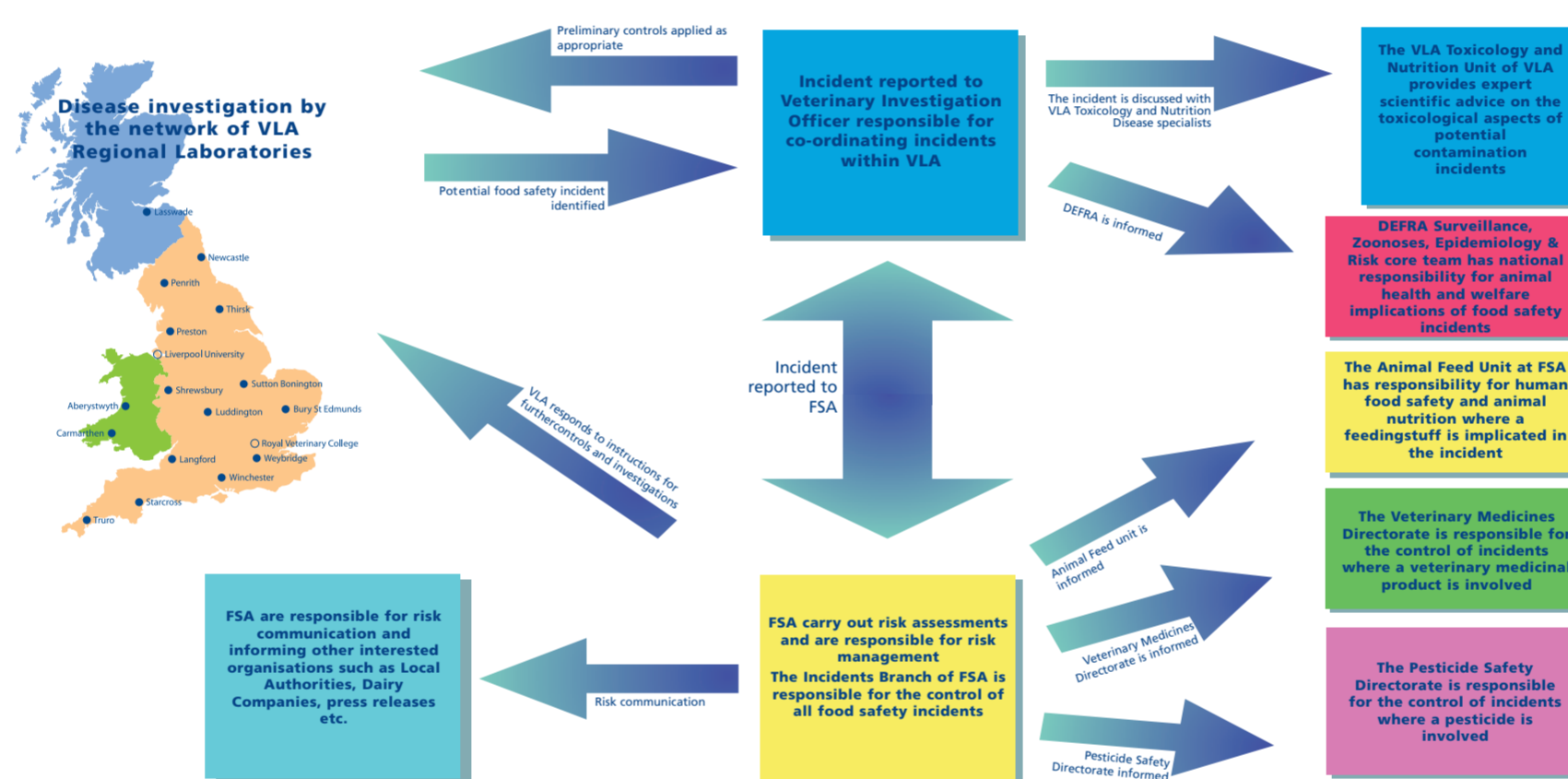
The following are regarded as potential food safety incidents:

- Any incident suspected to be caused, or contributed to, by a chemical or biological toxin.
- Any incident where food animals have been exposed to unusual, or unusually high doses of, chemicals regardless of whether they are showing signs of disease.
- Any incident where a suspected adverse reaction to a medicine or other substance is involved.
- Any incident suspected to be caused by or related to purchased feeds or feed supplements or a particular batch of home produced feed.
- Any incident affecting food animals that remains undiagnosed following preliminary investigations, where poisoning due to a chemical contaminant cannot be ruled out.
- Any incident where, as the investigation progresses, the possibility of chemical contamination becomes apparent.

Potentially serious incidents are those where there is an immediate and widespread risk to the food chain, for example:

- where lactating ruminants or poultry producing eggs for human consumption have been exposed.
- where animals close to slaughter have been exposed.
- where more than one farm is apparently affected simultaneously.
- where feed suspected to be contaminated has been delivered to multiple farms.

REPORTING OF FOOD SAFETY INCIDENTS

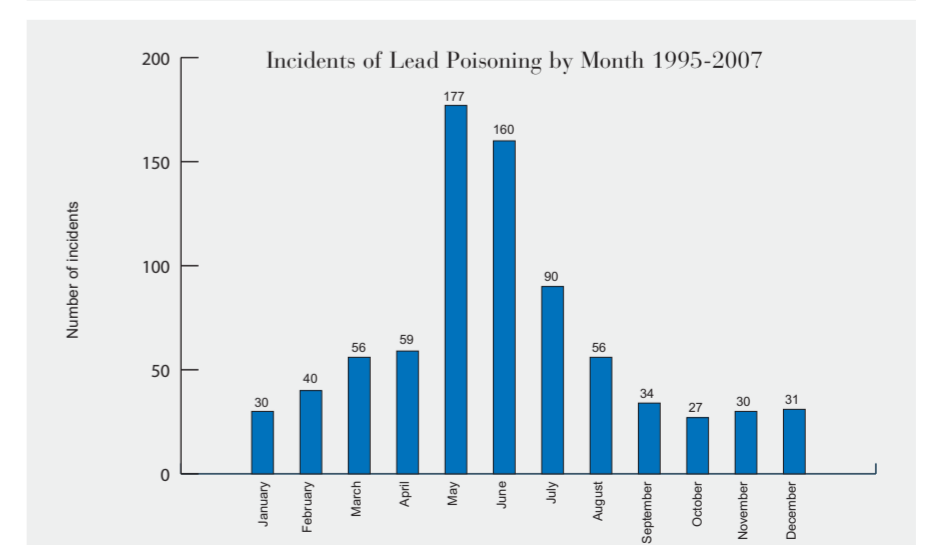
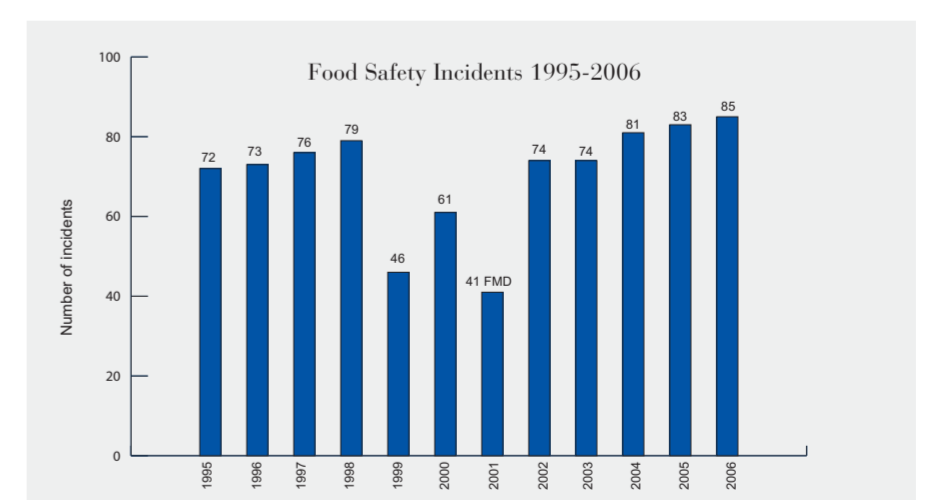


POTENTIAL FOOD SAFETY INCIDENTS 1990 TO 2007

- The Veterinary Laboratories Agency (the Veterinary Investigation Service prior to 1995) have been investigating potential food safety incidents since 1990.
- In that time more than 1200 incidents have been investigated; poisoning due to lead accounts for the majority of cases. Most incidents involve cattle, although a significant number are recorded in sheep.
- The following charts and tables show the principal contaminants that have been identified and the species in which they have been found. Lead poisoning cases show a seasonal rise associated with turnout.

Food Safety Incidents 1990-2007		
Most frequent diagnoses made for each species		
Cattle	Lead	718
	Botulism	136
	Copper	26
	Metaldehyde	13
	Mycotoxins	10
	Rodenticide	8
	Mercury	6
Sheep	Copper	96
	Lead	47
	Botulism	12
	Ionophore	11
	Selenium	5
	Organophosphate	2
	Zinc	2
Pigs	Arsenic	1
	Mycotoxins	3
	Asphalt/pitch	2
	Lead	1
	Cadmium	1
	Metaldehyde	1
	Rodenticide	1
Avian	Organophosphate	1
	Copper	1
	Ionophore	25
	Lead	23
	Mercury	1
	Rodenticide	1
	Ethylene glycol	1
	Salt	1
	Copper	1

Food Safety Incidents 1990-2000		
Environmental Contaminants	Lead	790
	Botulism	149
	Mycotoxins	15
	Arsenic	10
Feed Supplements	Copper	124
	Zinc	3
	Linseed/hydrocyanic acid	2
Veterinary Medicines	Ionophores	38
	Selenium	5
	Dimetridazole	4
Pesticides	Metaldehyde	14
	Rodenticide	12
	Organophosphate	8
	Mercury	7
Fertilizers	Nitrate	8



In all but one of the above incidents, the threat to the food chain has been contained through the agreement of farmers to voluntary restriction. The Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 has only been enforced on one occasion.