

Foods implicated in disease outbreaks in Germany in 2013

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To prevent foodborne diseases, extensive knowledge of the implicated foods as well as their production and treatment are required. The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is therefore collecting data on food involved in disease outbreaks since 2005.

A disease outbreak is suspected to be food-borne, if two or more persons are taken ill in connection with the same food. Once they have completed all investigations in relation to a food-borne illness outbreak, the state and Federal Armed Forces authorities responsible for food inspection send information on the foods involved to the BfR via the BELA¹ reporting system. The reporting procedure is based on the General Administrative Regulation (AVV) on “Zoonoses in the Food Supply Chain”.

For the year 2013, the BfR obtained information on 73 foodborne disease outbreaks for the purpose of assessment (2012: 84). The institute also received BELA alerts from two federal states on one diffuse disease outbreak. For 33 out of the 73 reported outbreaks, one food was, on the basis of good evidence, identified as the cause of the outbreak. For this assessment, both microbiological and / or epidemiological research results were used. The category “meat, meat products and sausages” dominated among the food vehicles. In addition, the BfR is analysing the places of exposure, the contributory factors and at what stage within the food chain these factors occurred.

In summary, the received information confirms that many of the food-borne illness outbreaks reported to the BfR in 2013 were again caused by insufficient hygiene and inappropriate temperature management. Appropriate investigation of consumers and regular training of personnel in restaurants and communal facilities on correct handling of food can all help prevent outbreaks.

In 2013, the BfR again received information on disease outbreaks following the consumption of raw milk. Therefore the BfR issued a press release to point out that children, pregnant women, the elderly and sick people in particular should refrain from consuming raw milk and raw milk products. This recommendation also applies to school classes and other groups of children visiting farms.

Leaflets with tips on how consumers can protect themselves against foodborne infections in private households can be downloaded free of charge from the BfR website under publications and can also be ordered there using the shopping cart function.

The full version of this BfR opinion is available in German on <http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/343/an-krankheitsausbruechen-beteiligte-lebensmittel-in-deutschland-im-jahr-2013.pdf>

¹ BELA stands for standardised federal system for recording data on foods implicated in disease outbreaks.