

NSW Vulnerable Persons Food Safety Scheme Consultative Committee

Wednesday 25 June 2014

Summary of meeting outcomes

The NSW Vulnerable Persons Food Safety Scheme Consultative Committee held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday, 25 June 2014. Specific issues considered by the Committee at its meeting are detailed below.

NSW Food Authority food safety program compliance report

The Committee noted the VP sector compliance report for the period 1 July 2013 to 31 December 2013. It was advised that during the reporting period there had been 781 acceptable rated audits with the overall failure rate still very low and down significantly for this period (3.5%) compared to the last 12 months which was 8.1%. None of the businesses that failed an audit in this period failed a consecutive follow up audit. Process control and failure to monitor records continue to be the main areas in which Corrective Action Requests (CARs) and Critical CARs are issued for the sector.

Members noted the new format of this compliance report which provides more detailed data than in previous reports and included graphs showing a comparison of results from two reporting periods. The introduction of the Byte Mobile auditing system has enabled the Authority to determine more specifically where issues are being raised and what questions are being asked. This will inform the Authority's education, training and advice to the different sectors as issues are identified in relation to compliance.

The Committee was advised that the Authority is always happy to discuss individual food safety plans with businesses to review what they are doing and make suggestions where appropriate. It was also noted that the Authority has made offers to do desk audits of the generic food safety manuals of large businesses which operate more than one facility so that they can be confident that all their facilities will have the same systems in place. As a result when an auditor goes to the facilities they are assessed on what they are doing against the manual, resulting in more consistency in audit reports across that business. The Authority would encourage that process as much as possible.

In terms of enforcement activities during the reporting period, it was noted there had been no long term non-compliance in the sector and no reported food borne illness outbreaks. This was a great result for the sector.

Use of Byte Mobile as an auditing tool

Committee members were given an overview and demonstration of the Byte Mobile auditing system using iPads which is now fully operational by NSW Food Authority officers when conducting audits in the field. This was introduced in June 2013 and has been revolutionary in terms of increasing efficiencies in the Authority's auditing processes.

The benefits of this system were outlined, including:

- It allows officers quick access to the Authority's entire data base and to previous inspection histories of premises.
- Officers can access standards, reference books and guidelines on-line and can show people how to access this information on the Authority's web-site.
- It has the ability to provide more comprehensive and detailed reports, with standardised information, set texts for check lists where defects are found, resulting in more uniformity in

writing reports. Photos of defects can be attached to reports so businesses can see issues that need rectifying.

- Reports can be emailed to businesses directly at the end of the audit. The system has seen a significant improvement in terms of saving time on administration for officers as it allows them to create and complete all inspections and audits in the field.
- It is allowing the Authority to be more precise in determining specific issues in each industry sector that require addressing and will help inform the Authority on where it should target its activities, training and educational advice through its publications and web-site.

Members were advised that there has been a good response from licensees to the new system and a lot of interest has been shown from other government agencies. The Authority would welcome any feedback from the Committee on this as well.

It was indicated that the Authority is planning a long-term project to roll this system out to Third Party auditors at some stage in the future, most probably during the 2015-16 financial year.

Use of electrolyte water for cleaning & sanitation

A paper prepared by the Authority's Science and Technical Unit was tabled in response to a question the Authority had received from a facility regarding the use of electrolysed water as an alternative to traditional chemical cleaning and sanitising products. It was noted that the Authority's position on this was that electrolysed water can be used, provided procedures are appropriately maintained and monitored to confirm the concentration of chlorine in the sanitising solution, especially in environments where *Listeria monocytogenes* is of concern.

Preparation of texture modified foods

The Committee discussed a paper clarifying guidelines for preparation of texture modified and puréed foods. This issue had been raised due to recent problems being identified in audits of VP premises during texture modification of foods, particularly with the use of food left over following the completion of plating. The Authority's Science and Technical Unit had reviewed the current guidelines on this process and recommended an extra step that "Left-over food from the plating line may be texture modified providing it is refrigerated during plating or processed within 2 hours of food temperature entering the danger zone. Reheating should allow for potential *Listeria monocytogenes* contamination (70°C for 2 minutes)."

Members agreed that this is a high risk process which needs to have this extra control in place. The potential for hygiene issues arising from contamination from equipment (particularly blenders) and the risk of patients choking from improperly puréed foods was also noted. The Committee endorsed the recommendation in the report and requested that further advice on this issue be provided to industry via the Authority's communication channels.

Serving of rockmelon to patients in hospitals and aged-care facilities

The Committee considered a request from a hospital dietician to serve rockmelon to patients in light of the reference to melons under 'Recommended control measures for higher risk foods' in the *Guideline for food service to vulnerable populations*.

It was explained that when the *Guideline* was redrafted three years ago the Authority took the stance that the withdrawal of higher risk foods should be a clinical decision made on a centre by centre basis; as long as suitable risk management processes are in place to sanitise produce, hospitals and aged-care facilities should be able to serve a wide range of fruit and vegetables to their patients and residents. The strict controls around sanitation give centres the freedom to choose what types of food they will serve in their facilities. However, depending on the type of operation and the clientele, in some cases it may be easier to stick to zero tolerance of serving higher risk foods.

It was noted that HealthShare NSW at a policy level has made the decision not to serve rockmelon to patients at its Food Service facilities.

The Authority will keep a watching brief on this issue.

Labelling requirements under Food Standard 1.2.3

The Committee considered a paper regarding allergen labelling requirements under Food Standard 1.2.3 which was tabled following an enquiry from HealthShare around the packaging of a particular product which splits its labelling information between the outer carton and individual packets held within. As many hospitals use portion control items in their menus, there was concern that packets separated from the original carton may not contain sufficient allergen information.

It was advised that the Authority will be conducting further investigations on this issue and will report back to the Committee on outcomes.

Food preparation supervision

Following a query from HealthShare NSW, the Committee considered the issue of whether there is a requirement for nursing or clinical staff who supervise more than six patients/residents in food preparation as part of their rehabilitation program to complete Food Safety Supervisor (FSS) training.

It was made clear that FSS training is not required for these operations but the Authority would expect that these types of activities, including BBQs, would be covered in a facility's existing Food Safety Scheme arrangements.

It was noted that a number of standard training courses are available that can be accessed on line for staff if there is any concern, but these are not mandatory. The Authority's FSS requirements only apply to businesses that process and sell food at the retail level.

24 vs 48 hour rule

HealthShare NSW asked for clarification around the guidelines for the 24-hour/48-hour rule in relation to service, storage and discarding of ready-to-eat, frozen and packaged foods (including condiments and ingredients) to assist in writing a procedure around this. The Authority will seek guidance from its science and technical staff on this issue and provide further advice to industry when this is available.

The next meeting of the NSW Vulnerable Persons Food Safety Scheme Consultative Committee will be held on Wednesday 5 November 2014.