

Foods implicated in disease outbreaks in Germany in 2012

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To prevent foodborne diseases, extensive knowledge of the implicated foods as well as their production and treatment is 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 2012, the BfR obtained information on 84 foodborne disease outbreaks for the purpose of assessment (2011: 88). The institute also received BELA alerts from several federal states on three diffuse disease outbreaks. For 55 out of the 84 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 categories "ready meals and prepared dishes" and "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 2012 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.

On the occasion of a diffuse strawberry-associated norovirus outbreak and a disease outbreak caused by ciguatoxin in red snapper fillet, the BfR published relevant press information. The aim of these press releases was to educate the population about the hazards posed by frozen berries without sufficient heat treatment and by fish from tropical and sub-tropical regions.

Beyond that, the BfR provides leaflets with tips on how consumers can protect themselves against foodborne infections in private households.

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-2012.pdf>

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