Risiken erkennen – Gesundheit schützen

# Raising the age limit for cattle for removal of the spinal cord without this leading to an elevated BSE risk for consumers

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Until the pathogen of bovine spongiform encephalophathy (BSE) has been eradicated and as long as new infections are still possible, the removal of specified risk materials (SRMs) is the most effective way of protecting consumers from disease. SRM is the name given to potential BSE-pathogen containing tissue like, for instance the brain, spinal cord and vertebral column of cattle. To prevent SRM material reaching the food chain, it is removed directly after slaughter, dyed and not put to any further use. The specified risk materials that have to be removed depend on age at slaughter. In particular for the removal of the vertebral column as a specific risk material, the European Commission is currently planning to raise the age limit for all healthy, slaughtered cattle from 24 to 30 months. In a joint opinion, the Friedrich Loeffler Institute (FLI) responsible for animal health and the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) have assessed the EU proposal from the angle of its impact on consumer health protection.

According to FLI and BfR the age limit for the removal of the vertebral column as SRM should be raised to 30 months at the earliest in 2008. Assuming a mean incubation period for BSE of between five and six years and the full enforcement of the BSE protective measures introduced in December 2000 by 2002, then there will probably be no further risk of infection from the affected cattle by that time. The raising of the age limit from 2008 onwards would not, therefore, lead to any significant increase in the BSE risk for consumers.

The full version of this BfR Opinion is available in German on
http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/208/anhebung_der_altersgrenze_von_rindern_fuer_die_entnahme_der_wirbelsaeule.pd