

ZOONOSIS AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER

The incidence of zoonosis has increased world-wide; this fact is referred to in the W.H.O.s Six Report on the World Health Situation. The report cites "the inadequate health measures taken by uncoordinated veterinary and public health services" as a cause for the problem. Additional reasons listed include the increased numbers of animals in contact with man; environmental pollution; and the changing, patterns of land use and agricultural practices.

There is very little difference between man and animals as sources of micro" organisms capable of causing food poisoning. In the main, if contamination is by man, it occurs while the food is being prepared and/or served as food. Animal sources are a little further removed from the point of consumption of the food. Staphylococci are found in the nose, mouth, throat, and occasionally bruised tissue of animals which are used as food by man. Clostridium perfringens is a normal inhabitant of the intestinal tract of farm animals. Salmonella have been shown to frequently be present in farm animals and their environment.

In animals, salmonellae usually exist in a "carrier" state, and overt symptoms of disease are not apparent. An exception is a few host-adapted serotypes, such as *S. pullorum* which does cause illness and fatalities in poultry. This, of course, leads to difficulties in control. Successful *S. pullorum* campaigns have been possible since the disease is evident in farm flocks, but the other Salmonella have not, to date, been as successfully eliminated due to their frequent "carrier" status and the general lack of indication of their presence. Such organisms are always potential contaminants, during slaughtering operations of the edible parts of carcasses. Specific animal products, in themselves, may contain undesirable micro-organisms, for example, staphylococci in milk, salmonellae in eggs.

Environmental health officers carry out functions of both an educational and enforcement nature in areas of food hygiene, environmental health planning, water pollution and infectious disease control. Unfortunately, there is a lack of co-ordination in the planning and delivery of services related to zoonotic disease eradication. Important programmes touching on this area are the responsibility of several government departments, and the lack of coordination of these activities results in gross inefficiencies and frustration.

The Joint Services Committee on Zoonosis was established with the approval of the then Tánaiste and Minister for Health, Mr Erskine Childers T.D., and the then Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, Mr Neil Blaney T.D. in January, 1970. The Committee is composed of ten members, five each from the medical and veterinary professions. Their latest report on Zoonosis on Meat was completed in December 1981.

It is our view that a Committee established to tender advice to government ministers on measures necessary to prevent and control the spread of zoonotic diseases in Ireland should include E.H.O. members. This view is held because of the professional involvement of our members not alone in

food control and food premises inspection, but also in planning, health education, water pollution, law enforcement, microbiological monitoring of food and the environment and the delivery of environmental health services.