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Abstract (publication only)

Absence of faecal shedding of *Listeria monocytogenes* in the Netherlands

D.L.J. Hess*, P.H.M. Savelkoul, C.J.C.M. Hamilton, P.M. Schneeberger, C.W. Ang (Amsterdam, 's-Hertogenbosch, NL)

Objectives: In the Netherlands, *Listeria monocytogenes* faecal carriage of up to 70% has been described. *Listeria* is usually acquired by consuming food contaminated with *L. monocytogenes*. Because of its high mortality (up to 30%), listeriosis is a major public health concern and the Community legislation lays down food safety criteria for *Listeria* in risk products. The aim of this study was to determine faecal shedding of *L. monocytogenes* using culture and PCR. **Methods:** A total of 437 stool specimens was collected from four different patient groups (267 gastro-enteritis patients, 91 immunocompromised patients, 45 pregnant women and 35 chronic bowel disease patients, respectively). Culture was performed using cold enrichment and PALCAM selective agar plates. PCR was performed using a primer-probe combination as described by Oravcová et al., targeting the *actA* gene. **Results:** None of the faecal samples was *L. monocytogenes* positive, neither culture nor PCR positive. 4.8% (20/437) of the samples could not be assessed using PCR due to inhibition of the PCR reaction. **Conclusion:** Compared to previous Dutch reports in the seventies of the last century, faecal shedding of *Listeria* has dramatically declined in the Netherlands. Since publication of these reports there have been major changes in regulations on food safety. Our data suggest that the current food safety policy in the Netherlands regarding *L. monocytogenes* control is highly successful.