

# Salmonella and the beansprouts

A food warning has gone out to food establishments in Edinburgh over the importance of proper handling of raw bean sprouts.

An investigation into an outbreak of salmonella by the Health Protection Agency and Health Protection Scotland has identified possible links to raw bean sprouts.

There have been 58 cases reported in England since the start of August and 15 cases in Scotland.

Currently, eight of these cases have been reported amongst Lothian's residents.

An investigation is currently ongoing and no conclusive source has been identified. However, as a precaution the City of Edinburgh Council and the Food Standards Agency would like to remind people of the importance of preparing and cooking raw bean sprouts.

Bean sprouts that are labelled 'ready to eat' can be eaten uncooked, as long as they are consumed within the 'use-by' date. However, bean sprouts not labelled 'ready to eat' should be cooked thoroughly until they are piping hot all the way through.

The Food Standards Agency recommends that for bean sprouts to be completely safe, they must be cooked thoroughly until they are steaming hot. And large bean sprouts, which are often added to a stir-fry, should be left to simmer for a few minutes whilst cooking.

The main advice for bean sprouts before cooking should be:

- Keep them refrigerated.

- Avoid sprouts that have turned brown or have a strange odour.
- Rinse raw bean sprouts thoroughly.
- Follow any instructions on the packaging and use the bean sprouts by the 'use by' dates.
- Bean sprouts that are labelled 'ready to eat' can be eaten uncooked, as long as they are consumed within the 'use-by' date.
- Bean sprouts not labelled 'ready to eat' should be cooked thoroughly until they are piping hot all the way through.
- If you are in any doubt as to whether the bean sprouts are 'ready to eat', or in the absence of clear preparation instructions, always cook the bean-sprouts thoroughly before eating. This includes bean sprouts that are labelled or appear 'pre-washed', but are not described as 'ready to eat'.

Councillor Robert Aldridge, Environmental Leader, said: "We readily give advice on how to prepare and cook food to avoid the potential risks of contamination and food poisoning and with raw bean sprouts it is essential that they should be cooked properly. I would urge restaurant owners and the general public to take the FSA's advice on preparing and cooking bean sprouts so that any possible illness can be avoided at all costs."

People with weakened immune systems, as well as the very old and the very young, should not eat raw sprouts.

If any member of the public has concerns they can call the Council on: 0131 529 3030.