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Microbial pathogens in food confiscated at airport Vienna

THE 7th FP EU funded project „Protection of Consumers through Mitigation of Segregation of Expertise (PROMISE)” studies food-borne pathogens transmitted into EU-28 through less researched gates. One part focused on travelers carrying food in their hand luggage.

At Austria`s main airport Wien Schwechat, more than 11 tons of food are annually confiscated by border authorities from travelers hand luggage. We accompanied the authority for 8 month and took 600 food samples of animal origin carried along by passengers that flew into Vienna from destinations assignable to 33 countries worldwide. The total amount of food confiscated by these 600 checks peaked to 1278 kg. By using ISO methods, we could confirm a prevalence of Salmonella spp, Listeria monocytogenes and VTEC of 1.1% (n=7), 2.5% (n=15), and 1.3% (n=8), respectively. Campylobacter could not be isolated from any food commodity what was surprising since several raw poultry meat samples were confiscated (in one case 14 kg). Salmonella isolates belonged to serotypes Telaviv, Hadar, Ohio, Brandenburg, Mbandaka, and Anatum (n=2). Two S. Hadar isolates from food originating from Egypt and one S. Anatum isolate from food originating from Ethiopia tested multidrug resistant. Listeria monocytogenes mainly belonged to the MLST (ST) type 9 known to be prevalent in Asian countries. All seven VTEC strains confirmed were non-0157: O2:H27, O6:H10, O8:HNM (two isolates), O39:H48, O178:H7 and Orough:H7. The study shows for the first time that food shuttled illegally into EU-28 by global travelers is contaminated at frequencies similar to those usually found when domestic samples are investigated. However, yet undescribed genetic variants could be transmitted. The pure amount of food shuttled illegally in hand luggage implies that the information of travelers should be enforced.