

Government launches war on campylobacter



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A concerted effort is underway to tackle campylobacter – the UK's leading cause of food poisoning – with 12 new projects planned at various universities and research centres.

Some £4m of public funding is being pumped into the projects, which are being co-ordinated by the [Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council](#) (BBSRC), the [Food Standards Agency](#) and [DEFRA](#).

"The most common source of campylobacter infection in humans is poultrymeat – either through consumption of undercooked product or cross-contamination in the kitchen," said a statement.

"Whilst good hygiene and thorough cooking can effectively prevent infection, there are still a high number of cases (more than 300,000 a year in England and Wales), and the cost to the economy is estimated at up to £600m a year."

The projects will look at three main areas:

- When infection begins in poultry and what are the common points of contamination
- How bio-control of campylobacter on farms and during processing can make a difference
- The biology of and the interaction between the bacteria and the bird.

One particular project, to be undertaken by the [Scottish Agricultural College](#), will look at the efficacy of on-farm bio-security, with the aim of

identifying the most successful interventions, such as fly screens and drinking water treatments.

Another project, by the [University of Bristol](#), will look at the effects of diet on the colonisation of the gut, while [Campden BRI](#) will look at ways of reducing contamination in the slaughterhouse, including using lactic acid solutions, ozonated water and carbon dioxide pellets.

"Improving public health by tackling campylobacter is a key priority for the Food Standards Agency," said FSA chief scientist Andrew Wadge. "The levels found on raw chicken are too high in the UK and we are working with industry to reduce them significantly."

Peter Bradnock, chief executive of the [British Poultry Council](#), said the work was vital to better inform the controls already in place on farms and across the production chain. "Poultry companies are fully engaged with the researchers and are collaborating on these projects to find more effective interventions against this most difficult organism."

According to the BBSRC statement, the research will underpin the UK poultry industry, which is worth £4bn at the retail level and employs 35,000 people. It will also enhance food security through improved food safety and reduced wastage.