

STOIC MEETING – NOTES & INFORMATION

Age Concern Hall, Linden Road – Friday 13th March 2009

The theme for our meeting was **Food Safety** with respect to this years Food Safety Week (15th-21st June) which is targeting the over 60s with food hygiene advice on the need for correct storage and handling of food in the home.

Our guest speaker was Nigel Burton, Food Hygiene Inspection Officer for Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC). The reason for the focus on older people (over 60s) is the recent rise in cases of listeria specifically within this age group. In fact the number of cases has doubled since 2001. The campaign will focus on practical advice and actions that people can do for themselves to help reduce the risk of contracting listeria and other bacteria-related illnesses like E.coli, including storing food correctly by:

- Keeping fridges at the correct temperature
- Following storage instructions on labels
- Using food by its 'Use-By' date (explain difference between 'Best Before')

Nigel wanted our input and feedback to help him structure and deliver the programme to best meet the needs of older people by developing new materials to use with this audience in mind. Suggestions included informative leaflets, posters and giveaways such as temperature probes. Leaflets to address items such as types of bacteria should be in a friendly (easy to understand) and informative way.

A question was asked about the testing and monitoring of old microwaves with respect to safety (i.e. radiation leaks, electrics) as well as correct usage (cooking/de-frosting). TVBC confirmed that they no longer have a programme in place for electrical testing due to increased reliability of modern microwaves. However, they did agree to consider issuing an information sheet on good industry practice for microwave testing. Regular cleaning is important from a hygiene perspective in terms of removing burnt food etc.

The audience collectively recommended that TVBC should consider setting up a mock-up of a kitchen to highlight the things that people should be concerned about and watch out for e.g. the dangers and risks of cross-contamination and contracting illnesses like listeria due to incorrect storage and handling of food. There could also be live demonstrations of handling raw products and preparing food to reinforce the key messages. Other suggestions included a quiz sheet with multiple choice answers and a small giveaway on completion and return. The more 'visual/hands-on' content the greater the impact on peoples awareness and information retention. A caravan or trailer centrally located in Romsey (say outside the Cornmarket) would be the ideal choice. Other options could include using the Crosfield Hall facility.

Other suggestions from the audience included:

- Ready meals – advice on keeping, sell-by, use-by, best before dates, no reheating!
- Pre-packed / processed food – more availability, more risk
- Cooked meats - use-by date, storage etc...
- Basic 'need to know' information on the different types of common bacteria and how to avoid them.
- List of 10 most 'dangerous' foods (high-risk for bacteria)
- Top tips in helping not to waste food.
- Temperature control, safe storage, correct chilled storage. Thermometers specifically designed for older people to use (size/colour considerations) - idea for a giveaway (some large supermarkets e.g. Co-op may be able to help with funding).

- Information packs to be available at GP surgeries, residential care homes, community groups, voluntary organisations, charities, etc
- Cleaning products (cloths, chemicals etc) – advice on which to use - depending on each situation.
- Specific guidance for partially-sighted older people, particularly when living alone. What tools are available to help? User friendly specialised equipment e.g. talking microwave. ‘Open Sight’ group (based in Eastleigh) may be able to advise. People are often too embarrassed to ask for help. Peter White, BBC TV and Radio presenter for the Solent area, and registered blind, may be a good champion of the cause.

For consideration / feedback....

- Small portions are not easy to find, therefore need to buy larger amounts/portions which take longer to consume and greater risk of becoming ‘out-of-date’.
- Instructions on labels and products – often the print is too small to properly read, also some colours on certain backgrounds make for more difficult reading. Black lettering on white background is often best. Coloured backgrounds are more difficult. Lower case rather than upper case. Guidance on clearer labelling is recommended.
- Packaging. Older people often struggle with excessive amounts of packaging. Bigger tabs to ‘pull with’ are preferable.

Members are encouraged to save manufacturers packaging labels/instructions from food, showing both good and bad examples, for further feedback/discussion.

We plan to feedback progress made at our next meeting (29th May).

A.O.B.

Members Interest Forms. By completing one of these gives you the opportunity to raise any particular interests, issues or concerns. We try to address/take these forward on our collective behalf. Input can also form the basis of future items and speakers at our meetings. We want to hear your views, opinions and concerns. For instance at this meeting one of our members raised the concern of older people living alone without receiving regular contact with or from other people. Highlighted by the recent tragic situation where an old lady was found in the bath at her home having been there for several days. She later died in hospital.

STOIC Newsletter. We have produced our first newsletter which is now being circulated. We are using this (in conjunction with our new website) to inform people of our latest news and activities, notes from recent meetings and of course future meeting dates and topics. The newsletter will evolve over time but would appreciate any comments or input to be sent to Veronica Lakey (oakbank21@talktalk.net). Of course we can include Food Safety information in future editions.

STOIC Website. We have now set this up at www.romseynet.org.uk/STOIC.html (Romseynet is the community-based website for the Romsey and District area). This is a useful vehicle for promoting and publicising our organisation and its activities. Included is lots of good information (notes from previous meetings), diary section/meeting dates, list of key contacts, copies of our newsletter, amongst other things.

Our next STOIC meeting will take place on Friday 29th May at the Age Concern Hall, Romsey from 2.05 to 4.00pm. The topic will be ‘non-clinical services’ in hospitals e.g. cleaning, catering, portering etc. Our guest speaker will be Peter Holloway from Southampton General Hospital. Let’s hear your views and opinions!