SUMMARY PROFILE FOR CAMPYLOBACTER

1 DESCRIPTION
Campylobacter is a type of bacteria which is frequently present in the intestines of farm animals and poultry. The bacteria can also be found in companion animals, wildlife and the environment. Some species of Campylobacter cause illness in humans, but these species seldom cause any illness in animals. In humans infection can cause a severe form of food poisoning often with diarrhoea and frequently abdominal pain. It is the most commonly isolated bacterial gastrointestinal pathogen in the human. The bacteria are present in the faeces of a significant percentage of animals and poultry entering abattoirs and this can result in the contamination of meat and especially poultry meat during the slaughter process. Humans usually pick up the disease by eating the food, or drinking milk or water which has been contaminated with the bacteria.

2 RATIONALE FOR GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION
2.1 Protection of Human Health
Campylobacter is the most common type of bacterial food poisoning in GB.
2.2 Society
There is a significant economic impact through loss of working time as a result of infection with campylobacter. The disease in humans varies in severity and symptoms, which may include headache, fever, diarrhoea and abdominal pain, may last a few days or in some cases may persist for weeks.
2.3 Trade
There are no current implications for trade.
2.4 Welfare
The Campylobacter species which are isolated from clinical human cases are not associated with illness in animals.

3 LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW
There is no specific legislation applying to campylobacter infection of public health significance in animals. EU and domestic legislation seeks to protect human health by ensuring the hygienic production of meat and dairy products.

4 GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION
UK – Campylobacter is widely present in livestock and poultry throughout GB. A GB wide abattoir survey in 1999-2000 showed that 24% of cattle, 17% of sheep and 94% of pigs carried campylobacter of public health significance in their faeces. The prevalence in poultry is not known but a survey by the Food Standards Agency in 2003 found that campylobacter was present on 50% of chicken on retail sale. EU – Campylobacter is present in animals and poultry throughout Europe. International – Campylobacter is present in animals and poultry throughout the world.

5 RISK OF INTRODUCTION / SPREAD
HIGH – The infection is present in animals throughout GB. There is a high probability of introducing additional infection in imported animals. How the infection spreads between and within herds and flocks is not fully understood. Because the infection does not produce disease or clinical signs in animals, there is a high risk of the infection being introduced unknowingly with purchased stock. It may also be introduced into flocks and herds on boots, equipment, etc.

6 HUMAN HEALTH IMPLICATIONS
Campylobacter is a significant human pathogen. Most cases of infection are sporadic and the route of transmission remains unknown in many cases, but it is believed that humans usually pick up the infection by eating campylobacter contaminated food or drink. Only a small number of bacteria are necessary to produce food poisoning and cross contamination in kitchens is likely to be a significant risk if hygiene standards are poor. In 2003 there were over 48,000 human cases of campylobacter reported in GB.

7 GB DISEASE CONTROL STRATEGY
The Food Standards Agency has launched a campaign to reduce campylobacter in retail chickens. This will involve a campaign to improve bio-security on housed poultry reared for meat on farms to prevent the introduction of campylobacter into flocks supported by action in poultry slaughterhouses to reduce the risks of contamination carcasses with campylobacter.

8 CURRENT SURVEILLANCE
Outbreak Investigation: Outbreaks in humans are investigated by the medical authorities, but in the case of Campylobacter few outbreaks are identified and most cases recorded are sporadic. Defra and Meat and Livestock Commission carried out a national survey of cattle, sheep and pigs in 1999-2000 and this was repeated in 2003. Analysis of the results is not yet available.

9 COSTS
No direct costs of animal disease. Conducting a national survey for Campylobacter in cattle, sheep and pigs may cost in excess of £500,000.

10 STAKEHOLDER IMPACT
Responsibilities – Poultry farmers have a responsibility to maintain effective bio-security. Abattoirs have a responsibility to maintain good hygiene standards to minimise the risk of carcase contamination with campylobacter. Good practices in the handling and preparation of food may also reduce the risk of becoming infected. A reduction of the levels of campylobacter at all stages in the food chain where it is achievable should help to reduce the number of cases of foodborne campylobacter cases. Defra is collaborating with the Food Standard Agency and others in research to reduce the prevalence of this pathogen.

11 COMPENSATION
No compensation is payable

For further information contact vetsurveillance@defra.gsi.gov.uk
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VETERINARY AND EPIDEMIOLOGICAL INFORMATION

Source Data
The OIE (Office International Epizooties) website [http://www.oie.int/eng/maladies/en_classification.htm]
P - The Department of Health website
T - WHO website
U - The Food Standards Agency website
V - The FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) website

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NB Sections 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 to have Veterinary review.

LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

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NB Sections 3, 7, 9, 10 and 11 to have Policy review.

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