



Preventing Infectious Intestinal Disease in the Domestic Setting: A Shared Responsibility

A joint conference by the International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene (IFH) and the Public Health and Laboratory Service (PHLS) in association with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)

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Introduction

Within the European Community it is generally agreed that the incidence of infectious intestinal disease (IID) is unacceptably high. Although a report of the World Health Organization (WHO) monitoring programme shows that the number of *Salmonella* infections is now falling, infections by pathogens such as *Campylobacter* continue to rise.¹ A recent U.K. community-based study estimated that the true U.K. incidence of IID is about 9.5 million cases per annum (one in five of the population).² The high incidence of IID has also been reported by the U.K. Food Standards Agency.³

The home is potentially an important source of infection in some of these cases. Infectious intestinal disease can on some occasions be introduced into the home by infected individuals or pets—only a proportion of the infections can be traced to contaminated food. This suggests a need to increase the emphasis on infection prevention, especially in view of the fact that the greatest increase in gastrointestinal infections are attributable to viral agents. Prevention of these infections in the home may be of particular importance for groups in whom the consequences are potentially more serious. These include neonates, the elderly and people cared for at home who are immunocompromised through drug treatment or chronic illness.

Awareness of these issues has led to the realization that hygiene in the domestic setting must be given greater priority. The complex and unpredictable nature of micro-organisms means that the responsibility for controlling infectious disease must be shared by the public and the community. Currently, concerns about infectious disease and the importance of hygiene relate mainly to hospital or institutional settings, or to the production of food and other commodities.

The importance of prevention in the domestic setting in the chain of infection transmission through the community is often given little consideration. In devising an effective hygiene policy for the home it must be considered that homes are very different from hospital and institutional environments which take into account hygienic design and construction and where hygiene education is mandatory. Evidence and experience is now showing that home hygiene policies need to take greater consideration of the issues which are specific to the domestic environment.

In recognition of the importance of hygiene in the home, this conference served to unite the research base provided by the PHLS and the LSHTM with the work of the IFH in highlighting the importance of infection control in the domestic setting. The first day of the conference, chaired by Professor Hugh Pennington, focused on many of the issues related to gastrointestinal disease in the home, including disease incidence and surveillance, gastrointestinal pathogens and identification of groups at highest risk. The concept of targeted hygiene as a rational approach to the prevention of infectious intestinal disease in the domestic setting was also introduced. The second day of the conference was chaired by Dr Judith Hilton of the Food Standards Agency, U.K. and covered subjects ranging from hygiene behaviour and motivation to concerns about antibacterial and antibiotic microbial resistance, all of which need to be considered in developing an effective hygiene policy for the home. It is with great pleasure that the abridged conference presentations given during this meeting are now published in the *Journal of Infection*.

*International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene (IFH)
Public Health and Laboratory Service (PHLS)*

References

- 1 Tirado C, Schmidt K (eds) *WHO Surveillance Programme for Control of Foodborne Infections and Intoxications in Europe*. 7th Report on Surveillance of Foodborne Diseases in Europe 1993–98. WHO; 2000.
- 2 Wheeler JG, Sethi D, Cowden JM *et al*. Study of infectious intestinal disease in England: rates in the community, presenting to general practice, and reported to national surveillance. *Br Med J* 1999; **318**: 1046–1050.
- 3 Food Standards Agency. *A report of the study of infectious intestinal disease in England*. Food Standards Agency, 2000.

Note

The views presented at this conference are the personal and professional opinions of the speakers and do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS), the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) or the International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene (IFH).