



## Information for processors using imported frozen berries

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has made significant progress in its investigation of imported frozen berries associated with a number of recent Hepatitis A cases.

MPI is reminding processors and manufacturers who use imported frozen berries as an ingredient to consider Hepatitis A as a hazard that is reasonably likely to occur. They should ensure that they have the appropriate controls in their process to address this hazard. An exception is if they have evidence demonstrating that this hazard is unlikely to occur in the imported frozen berries that they use. This means having full documentation on, and independent verification of, the producer's control measures. These should include:

- Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)
- Sickness policies
- Sanitation facilities and controls
- Controls on irrigation water used in berry production
- Product traceability.

Hepatitis A is a relatively hardy pathogen that is able to survive freezing, freeze drying, and/or heat treatments of less than 85°C for 1 minute (or an equivalent process). It is also relatively stable in an acid environment and in foods with a higher °Brix.

Food processors and manufacturers should review their controls if they manufacture freeze dried berries from frozen imported berries, or if they are using imported frozen berries as an ingredient in a product. All food contact equipment and other surfaces should be cleaned and sanitised after processing untreated berries.

Imported berries should be heated to at least 85°C for 1 minute, or subject to an equivalent process. Packaging should be disposed of and not re-used.

MPI has developed guidance for food business operators to help determine whether their thermal process is sufficient to inactivate Hepatitis A in their product. This guidance is in the attached Science report (Guidance for the thermal inactivation of Hepatitis A virus in Berries)

MPI also has a data sheet which provides useful information about the Hepatitis A virus.

[http://www.foodsafety.govt.nz/elibrary/industry/Hepatitis\\_Virus-Causes\\_Severe.pdf](http://www.foodsafety.govt.nz/elibrary/industry/Hepatitis_Virus-Causes_Severe.pdf)

All food businesses should be aware that sick food handlers may spread viruses to food. They should have sickness policies that exclude workers from handling food when they are ill. This is particularly important for any food that does not have a virus kill step after food is handled by workers. For further information see sections 4.1-4.4 of the Food Service and Retail Food Control Plan Template: <http://www.mpi.govt.nz/document-vault/10649>

If you are concerned about the safety of your food products, please contact your verifier if operating under a Risk Management Programme or if under a Food Safety Programme please contact the MPI helpline (0800 00 83 33).



## Information for verifiers/auditors checking businesses using imported frozen berries

Please refer to the previous page for the information that has been provided to food businesses.

Verifiers and auditors of food businesses that use imported berries should check that those businesses have appropriate:

- thermal processes to inactivate Hepatitis A and records to demonstrate that these processes have been implemented effectively; and
- measures in place to prevent recontamination of processed food.

Verifiers and auditors of all food businesses should also check that sick workers are excluded from handling food. This should be confirmed by talking to staff about how illness is managed and viewing appropriate records.