

Orienteering and E-coli 0157

A significant proportion of the ruminant population (includes cows, sheep and goats) are infected with E-coli 0157. This causes no problems for the individual animals but can have serious consequences for humans, especially children, if it enters the digestive system. The organism is excreted by the infected animals so could be found in fields used for parking and assembly area at orienteering competitions as well as elsewhere in the competition area.

Farmers and land managers allowing their fields to be used by the public for recreational purposes are provided with the following advice by the Scottish Executive Health Department in order to minimise the risk:

1. Keep farm animals off the fields for 3 weeks prior to use.
2. Remove any visible droppings, ideally at the beginning of the 3 week period.
3. Mow the grass, keep it short, and remove the clippings before the fields are used for recreational use.

It is unlikely that all farmers and land managers will be willing or able to provide this sort of service so we need to be aware of the risk and take some precautions ourselves:

1. Parents need to be vigilant on behalf of their children who may well get infected material on their clothes or hands.
2. Individuals should be aware that there may be infected material on their person, particularly on their shoes, that they may inadvertently transfer to themselves or others.
3. Organisers might like to consider erecting suitable notices or providing advice in pre-race information to make competitors aware of the risk.

It is strongly recommended that all participants, spectators, officials, etc, accept responsibility for their own personal hygiene and wash their hands thoroughly before eating.

BOF have made the usual providers of food aware of the possible risks associated with this organism so that they can make whatever provision they feel is necessary.

Detailed information on the subject can be found on the Scottish Health Department web site at: www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/health/ecsip2.pdf

If any club requires additional information regarding this subject, please contact the SOA Access Officer, Donald Petrie, 01505 613094, donald@scottish-orienteering.org

(Based on article which appeared in the Summer 2004 BOF Focus Magazine)