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Microbiology of food and animal feed — Real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based method for the detection of food-borne pathogens — Horizontal method for the detection of Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli (STEC) and the determination of O157, O111, O26, O103 and O145 serogroups

National foreword

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The UK participation in its preparation was entrusted to Technical Committee AW/9, Microbiology.

A list of organizations represented on this committee can be obtained on request to its secretary.

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Published by BSI Standards Limited 2012

ISBN 978 0 580 67595 9

ICS 07.100.30

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This Published Document was published under the authority of the Standards Policy and Strategy Committee on 30 November 2012.

Amendments issued since publication

Date	Text affected
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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION
SPÉCIFICATION TECHNIQUE
TECHNISCHE SPEZIFIKATION

CEN ISO/TS 13136

November 2012

ICS 07.100.30

English Version

Microbiology of food and animal feed - Real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based method for the detection of food-borne pathogens - Horizontal method for the detection of Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli (STEC) and the determination of O157, O111, O26, O103 and O145 serogroups (ISO/TS 13136:2012)

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Mikrobiologie von Lebensmitteln und Futtermitteln - Real-time-Polymerase-Kettenreaktion (PCR) zum Nachweis von pathogenen Mikroorganismen in Lebensmitteln - Horizontales Verfahren für den Nachweis von Shiga-Toxin bildenden Escherichia coli (STEC) der Serogruppen O157, O111, O26, O103 und O145 (ISO/TS 13136:2012)

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Foreword

This document (CEN ISO/TS 13136:2012) has been prepared by Technical Committee CEN/TC 275 "Food analysis - Horizontal methods" the secretariat of which is held by DIN, in collaboration with Technical Committee ISO/TC 34 "Food products".

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Introduction

Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) are pathogenic *E. coli*, which can cause diarrhoea as well as more severe diseases in humans such as haemorrhagic colitis and haemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). Although STEC may belong to a large number of serogroups, those that have been firmly associated with the most severe forms of the disease, in particular HUS, belong to O157, O26, O111, O103, and O145 (Reference [1]).

The following nomenclature has been adopted in this Technical Specification:

- *stx*: Shiga toxin genes (synonymous with *vtx*);
- *Stx*: Shiga toxin (synonymous with *Vtx*: Verocytotoxin);
- STEC: Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (synonymous with VTEC: Verocytotoxin-producing *Escherichia coli*).

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Microbiology of food and animal feed — Real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based method for the detection of food-borne pathogens — Horizontal method for the detection of Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) and the determination of O157, O111, O26, O103 and O145 serogroups

IMPORTANT — It is necessary to consider any STEC as pathogenic to humans and potentially to cause severe disease depending on both the risk profile of the food commodity (ready-to-eat foods vs. foods intended to be consumed after technological treatment such as pasteurization, cooking etc. used to reduce any bacteria present in the food) and the health status of the subject ingesting the food.

Moreover, given the high genomic plasticity of this bacterial species, it is possible that novel arrangements of virulence features can give rise to novel sero-pathogroups such as the Shiga toxin-producing enteroaggregative *E. coli* O104 that caused the HUS outbreaks in Germany and France in 2011-05/06. Novel atypical *E. coli* sero-pathogroups can arise from the acquisition of an *stx*-converting bacteriophage by an *E. coli* strain belonging to pathogroups different from STEC.

Such atypical strains fall in the scope of this method and can be efficiently detected as they are positive for the presence of the *stx* genes.

1 Scope

This Technical Specification describes the identification of Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) by means of the detection of the following genes:

- a) the major virulence genes of STEC, *stx* and *eae* (References [2][3]);
- b) the genes associated with the serogroups O157, O111, O26, O103, and O145 (References [3][4]).

In any case, when one or both of the *stx* genes is/are detected, the isolation of the strain is attempted.

The isolation of STEC from samples positive for the presence of the genes specifying the serogroups in the scope of this method can be facilitated by using serogroup-specific enrichment techniques (e.g. immunomagnetic separation, IMS).

The protocol uses real-time PCR as the reference technology for detection of the virulence and serogroup-associated genes.

This Technical Specification is applicable to:

- 1) products intended for human consumption and the feeding of animals;
- 2) environmental samples in the area of food production and food handling;
- 3) environmental samples in the area of primary production.

2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 7218, *Microbiology of food and animal feeding stuffs — General requirements and guidance for microbiological examinations*

ISO 20838, *Microbiology of food and animal feeding stuffs — Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for the detection of food-borne pathogens — Requirements for amplification and detection for qualitative methods*

ISO 22174, *Microbiology of food and animal feeding stuffs — Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for the detection of food-borne pathogens — General requirements and definitions*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

Definitions 3.1 to 3.3 have been compiled from the epidemiological data on disease caused by STEC managed by organizations such as the US Centers for Disease Control and, in the EU, by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the European Food Safety Authority.

3.1

Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli*
STEC

E. coli strains possessing the Stx-coding genes

3.2

Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* causing the attaching and effacing lesion
STEC causing the attaching and effacing lesion

E. coli strains possessing the Stx-coding genes and the intimin-coding gene *eae*

NOTE This combination of virulence genes is often associated with the most severe forms of STEC-induced disease.

3.3

Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* belonging to highly pathogenic serogroups
STEC belonging to highly pathogenic serogroups

E. coli strains possessing the Stx-coding genes, the intimin-coding gene *eae* and belonging to one of the serogroups O157, O111, O26, O103, and O145

4 Principle

4.1 General

The method specified comprises the following sequential steps:

- microbial enrichment;
- nucleic acid extraction;
- detection of virulence genes;
- detection of serogroup-associated genes;
- isolation from positive samples.

Figure A.1 is a flow diagram of the screening procedure.

4.2 Microbial enrichment

The number of STEC cells to be detected is increased by incubating the test portion in a non-selective liquid nutrient medium chosen from:

- modified tryptone-soy broth (tryptone soy broth supplemented with 1,5 g/l bile salts No.3, mTSB) supplemented with 16 mg/l of novobiocin (mTSB+N);
- buffered peptone water (BPW);

- c) modified tryptone-soy broth (tryptone-soy broth supplemented with 1,5 g/l bile salts No.3, mTSB) supplemented with 12 mg/l of acriflavin (mTSB+A) for analysis of milk and dairy products.

The mTSB shall be used when analysing matrices suspected to contain high levels of contaminating microflora. Novobiocin and acriflavin inhibit the growth of Gram-positive bacteria and promote the growth of Gram-negative cells, including STEC. The BPW shall be used to analyse samples which are assumed to contain stressed target bacteria (such as frozen products), to resuscitate stressed STEC cells, and expected lower levels of contaminating microflora than in fresh samples.

NOTE The addition of novobiocin is controversial and has been investigated by several authors. It has been observed that the minimum inhibitory concentration of the antibiotic for non-O157 STEC is lower than for O157 strains (Reference [5]). The addition of novobiocin in the enrichment mTSB at the usual concentration of 20 mg/l, as specified in ISO 16654,^[19] seems to inhibit the growth of about one-third of non-O157 strains (Reference [6]) increasing the risk of false-negative results.

4.3 Nucleic acid extraction

The nucleic acid is extracted according to the requirements of the adopted detection system.

4.4 Target genes

The purified nucleic acid is used for the detection of the following target genes:

- the main virulence genes for STEC: *stx* genes, encoding the Shiga toxins and the *eae* gene, encoding a 90 kDa protein, the intimin, involved in the attaching and effacing mechanism of adhesion, a typical feature of the STEC strains causing severe disease. The *stx* genes encode a family of toxins including two main types: *stx1* and *stx2*. The latter comprises seven recognized variants (from *stx2a* to *stx2g*) (Reference [22]). Only the variants *stx2a*, *stx2b*, and *stx2c* have been found to be produced by the STEC strains included in Clause 1, and therefore constitute the target Stx-coding genes of this Technical Specification. The GenBank accession numbers corresponding to the *stx2* variants-coding genes are:
 - *stx2a*: X07865
 - *stx2b*: L11078
 - *stx2c*: M59432
- the intimin-coding *eae* gene
- the *rfbE*(O157), *wbdI*(O111), *wzx*(O26), *ihp1*(O145) and *wzx*(O103) genes, to identify the corresponding serogroups.

4.5 Detection

The detection of the target genes is performed according to the adopted detection system.

4.6 Isolation

If the presence of a STEC is suspected, the isolation is attempted. If one of the serogroups specified in the scope of this Technical Specification is detected, a serogroup-specific enrichment (e.g. IMS) can be performed followed by plating on to tryptone–bile–glucuronic agar (TBX) or a specific selective medium if available (see Annex F, Notes 2 and 3) in order to facilitate the isolation of the STEC from the background flora.

5 Diluents, culture media and reagents

During the analysis, unless otherwise stated, use only reagents of recognized analytical grade and sterile distilled or demineralized water or water of equivalent purity.