



ISO TS/15216; an international standard method for the detection and quantification of norovirus in high risk foodstuffs

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ISO TS/15216; an international standard method for the detection and quantification of norovirus in high risk foodstuffs

James Lowther & CEN TC275/WG6 TAG4

Norovirus is one of the principal agents of food-related gastroenteritis. Outbreaks have been associated with a number of different food vehicles, most notably bivalve molluscan shellfish and soft fruit. Contamination of prepared food through contact with infected food handlers also presents a major safety risk. The introduction of testing for norovirus into food hygiene legislation and standard operating procedures for investigating foodborne outbreaks is a priority for many national and international authorities. Until recently this has been prevented by the lack of availability of standardised methods, however in March 2013 the International Standards Organisation (ISO) and European Committee for Standardization (CEN) published a joint technical specification for detection and quantification of viruses including norovirus GI and GII in foods using real-time RT-PCR (ISO/TS 15216). This paper will describe the development and validation of this method by an international working group of expert food virologists from twenty institutes in thirteen countries (CEN TC275/WG6 TAG4), the current and future implications of this method for European and International Food Hygiene Legislation and the application of the method to the testing of food samples implicated in outbreaks of norovirus gastroenteritis.