
**Microbiology of the food chain —
Horizontal method for the
immunoenzymatic detection of
staphylococcal enterotoxins in
foodstuffs**

*Microbiologie de la chaîne alimentaire — Méthode horizontale de
détection des entérotoxines staphylococciques par test immuno-
enzymatique dans les aliments*

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Contents

Page

Foreword	iv
Introduction	v
1 Scope	1
2 Normative references	1
3 Terms and definitions	1
4 Principle	2
5 Reagents	2
6 Apparatus	2
7 Sampling	3
8 Procedure	3
8.1 Preparation of test portion	3
8.2 Storage of the test sample	3
8.3 Extraction	4
8.4 Concentration of the extract (mandatory for milk and dairy products)	5
8.5 Recovery of the concentrated extract	5
8.6 Storage and steps before detection	6
8.7 Detection	6
8.8 Performance criteria	6
9 Quality control	6
10 Expression of results	7
11 Confirmation	7
12 Performance characteristics of the method	7
13 Test report	9
Annex A (informative) Results of interlaboratory studies: 2013	10
Annex B (informative) Results of interlaboratory studies: 2014	15
Annex C (informative) Note on interferences	21
Bibliography	22

Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation on the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see the following URL: www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) Technical Committee CEN/TC 275, *Food Analysis — Horizontal methods*, in collaboration with ISO Technical Committee TC 34, *Food products*, Subcommittee SC 9, *Microbiology*, in accordance with the agreement on technical cooperation between ISO and CEN (Vienna Agreement).

Introduction

Staphylococcal enterotoxins (SEs) are proteins that can be produced in foods, by certain strains of the coagulase positive staphylococci (CPS), mainly *Staphylococcus aureus*. These SEs are heat and acid stable toxins that cause nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhoea when ingested. Due to their stability SEs might still be present even when coagulase positive staphylococci cannot be detected. SEs consist of a family of more than 20 structurally-related globular monomeric proteins with molecular weights of 19 kDa to 30 kDa.[1] These proteins are relatively stable under changing environmental conditions, such as heat treatment, freezing and change in pH; moreover, they are resistant to proteolytic digestion. Typically, and depending on the sensitivity of affected individuals, nanogram (ng) amounts of enterotoxin can cause intoxication with the symptoms described above. Due to the influence of SEs on human health, the European Union has adopted legislation in order to increase consumer protection by defining microbiological criteria for foodstuffs, such as CPS enumeration and detection of SEs.[2]

Several methods have been developed for the detection and/or quantification of SEs. Some of these methods are based on enzyme immunoassay (EIA). Other methods are based on the chemical analysis using liquid chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS) for the detection and quantification of SEs. As these latter methods are currently under development, EIA methods have been chosen as the starting point for standardization of a detection method for SEs.

The aim is to detect SEs using commercially available test kits. This document describes the protocol for the extraction of SEs from food samples. Moreover, criteria for the performance of the kits have been evaluated on five types of food matrices before use based on the criteria given in this document.

Response rates of different staphylococcal food poisoning outbreaks were modelled as a function of ingested doses.[3] For this purpose, data from the literature as well as data from the European Union Reference Laboratory for CPS were used.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) benchmark dose methodology was applied to this data set and helped to establish the benchmark dose (BMD).[4] The BMD is defined as the dose of a hazard (staphylococcal enterotoxin) likely to trigger health symptoms in a given percentage of the exposed population. The BMD lower limit (BMDL) is the lower 95 % (or 90 %) confidence interval of the BMD. This value was used to set up the acceptable value for the limit of detection 50 (LOD₅₀) of the various commercially available SE detection kits.

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Microbiology of the food chain — Horizontal method for the immunoenzymatic detection of staphylococcal enterotoxins in foodstuffs

1 Scope

This document specifies a screening method for the detection of staphylococcal enterotoxins SEA, SEB, SECs, SED and SEE in foodstuffs. It consists of two main steps: a) extraction followed by a concentration based on dialysis principle; and b) an immunoenzymatic detection using commercially available detection kits.

This document is applicable to the screening of staphylococcal enterotoxins SEA to SEE in products intended for human consumption.

Other staphylococcal enterotoxins such as types SEG, SEH, SEI, SER, SES and SET can also cause illness. Due to the lack of commercially available detection kits, this document is applicable only to types SEA to SEE, but may apply to other types of toxins, subject to validation of the method.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements 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 3696, *Water for analytical laboratory use — Specification and test methods*

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

3 Terms and definitions

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

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>
- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <http://www.iso.org/obp>

3.1

staphylococcal enterotoxin A, B, C, D, E

SEA, SEB, SEC, SED, SEE

exoprotein SEA, SEB, SEC, SED and SEE produced by enterotoxigenic strains of coagulase positive staphylococci, mainly *Staphylococcus aureus* with a molecular weight ranging from 19 kDa to 30 kDa

3.2

specificity

SP

number of samples found to be negative divided by the total number of blank samples tested

3.3
sensitivity
SE

number of samples found to be positive divided by the total number of samples tested at a given level of contamination

3.4
limit of detection 50
LOD₅₀

concentration (ng SE/g) for which the probability of detection is 50 %

3.5
benchmark dose
BMD

dose of a hazard (e.g. staphylococcal enterotoxin) likely to trigger health symptoms in a given percentage of the exposed population

4 Principle

This document specifies a method for the detection of staphylococcal enterotoxins (SEA to SEE) in all foodstuffs, consisting of two main steps: a) extraction followed by a concentration based on dialysis principle; and b) an immunoenzymatic detection using commercially available detection kits.

5 Reagents

Use only reagents of recognized analytical grade, unless otherwise specified.

5.1 Distilled or demineralized water or water of equivalent quality according to ISO 3696.

5.2 Hydrochloric acid (e.g. concentrations 5N, 1N or other dilutions).

5.3 Sodium hydroxide (e.g. concentrations 5N, 1N or other dilutions).

5.4 PBS (phosphate buffered saline), pH $7,3 \pm 0,2$ [NaCl/Na₂HPO₄: 145 mM/10 mM].

5.5 PEG, molecular weight 20 000 g/mol (PolyEthylene Glycol) solution.

Prepare a concentrated PEG solution: weigh 30 g of PEG powder, and add 70 ml of water ([5.1](#)).

5.6 Electrode cleaning solution (e.g. ethanol 70 %).

5.7 Immunoenzymatic detection kit dedicated to SEs. Any kit shall comply with the performance criteria in [8.7](#).

6 Apparatus

Usual microbiological laboratory equipment (in accordance with ISO 7218) and, in particular, the following.

6.1 Blender.

6.2 Balance.

6.3 Homogenization equipment, e.g. rotary homogenizer, blender or peristaltic homogenizer.

It is highly recommended to use a rotary homogenizer, in particular for all types of food difficult to mix in order to obtain a homogeneous sample. If a peristaltic homogenizer is used, only use bags without filter.

6.4 Shaker at room temperature, e.g. orbital shaker, magnetic stirrer, etc.

6.5 pH-meter and electrode, e.g. combination electrode.

6.6 Centrifuge, capable of operating at 3 130g minimum; if possible, capable of being refrigerated.

6.7 Dialysis membrane, molecular weight cut off (MWCO) of 6 000 Da to 8 000 Da.

6.8 Closures for dialysis membrane.

6.9 Filtering material, e.g. funnel and cotton-wool, glass-wool, etc.

6.10 Shallow tray.

6.11 Refrigerator ($3\text{ °C} \pm 2\text{ °C}$ or $5\text{ °C} \pm 3\text{ °C}$) and **freezer** ($\leq -18\text{ °C}$).

6.12 Laboratory ware in glass or polypropylene to avoid the adsorption of toxins (funnel, beaker, vial, centrifuge tube, etc.).

6.13 Equipment suitable for the detection kit used, see [5.7](#).

6.14 Water bath ($38\text{ °C} \pm 2\text{ °C}$).

7 Sampling

Sampling is not part of the method specified in this document.

8 Procedure

8.1 Preparation of test portion

In the case of cheese with rind, take about 10 % of rind and 90 % of core.

As enterotoxins can be heterogeneously distributed in the sample, if possible, mix and homogenize the whole sample or a representative part of it with a blender ([6.1](#)). Use 25 g of the homogenized sample as the test portion.

In the case of a suspected staphylococcal food poisoning outbreak (SFPO), the test sample size may be less than 25 g. Perform the analysis as described below and adapt the steps [8.3.1](#) to [8.5.2](#) accordingly. The ratio of the weight of the test portion and concentrated extract ([8.5.2](#)) should be approximately five [e.g. 25 g test portion for 5,0 g to 5,5 g (maximum 5,8 g for the sticky extracts) of concentrated extract, 12,5 g test portion for 2,5 g to 2,8 g (maximum 2,9 g for the sticky extracts) of concentrated extract].

8.2 Storage of the test sample

It is recommended to store the samples at $3\text{ °C} \pm 2\text{ °C}$ or $5\text{ °C} \pm 3\text{ °C}$ ([6.11](#)) before analysis.

If analysis is not performed within 24 h, it is possible to freeze the samples. In this case, completely thaw the samples at $3\text{ °C} \pm 2\text{ °C}$ or $5\text{ °C} \pm 3\text{ °C}$ before starting the analysis.