

An Fóram Uisce response to drinking water treatment issues at Ballymore Eustace and Gorey

The information that came to light over the weekend that 877,000 people were put at risk from failures in the treatment processes at Ballymore Eustace drinking water plant. It transpires that over a period of 10 hours on 20th and 21st August, the cryptosporidium (a parasitic protozoan that causes illness in humans) treatment barrier was broken and led to inadequate disinfection at the plant. The incident was not reported by Dublin City Council to Irish Water and therefore the EPA and HSE were not alerted to the risk until 1st September. This put the health of the population at risk and shows a total failure in management processes to protect public health. Unfortunately, this case is not alone. In Gorey, from the 19th to the 24th August an inappropriate amount of disinfection was used and this resulted in 52 people getting sick. In this case the EPA and HSE were not notified of the danger until 26th August.

The EPA state there was an 'abject failure of managerial oversight, operational control and responsiveness by Irish Water and the Local Authorities' in delivering secure and safe drinking water. The outcome is that the health of the public has been put at risk. The EPA reports finding further unreported incidents and states that this failure to report shows a lack of recognition that such incidents have serious implications of public health.

The EPA state that both plants have now returned to normal operations. Irish Water have stated that they are providing refresher training with plant engineers and supervisors to ensure that proper incidence management protocols are adhered to in future.

Currently, the management of treatment plants and the delivery of drinking water supplies is operated by local authorities and Irish Water. Irish Water state that this incident underlines the importance of creating a Single Purpose Utility (SPU) where service delivery is controlled and managed by one organisation.

Regardless of who provides drinking water supplies it is essential that the public can trust the supplier. The unacceptable delays in informing the EPA and HSE of this incident has clearly put the public at risk. This lack of transparency and the delays in communicating with customers further erodes the public confidence in Irish Water and the public authorities providing drinking water supplies.

The public have a right to trust their drinking water supplies and their health should not be put at risk by the water in their taps. It is not acceptable that people are getting ill or are not informed of the risk so that they can take preventative action.

Irish Water and the Local Authorities need to show that they are learning from previous mistakes and that the necessary checks and balances are in place to prevent future incidents of negligent management. The Water Forum recommends that at a minimum, the EPA need to consider sanctions for repeat offences that put the health of the public at risk.

End

[EPA Press Release](#)

Note to the Editor

An Fóram Uisce - The Water Forum was established as a statutory body in June 2018 to facilitate stakeholder engagement and debate on issues relating to water as a resource, water quality, rural water concerns, issues affecting customers of Irish Water and issues associated with the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. The Forum consists of 26 representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality. These include consumer, community and water sports groups, business and trade unions, environmental sector, Irish Water consumers, the group water scheme sector and a range of other sectors including education, agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The Forum is chaired by Prof. Tom Collins.

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