Department of Public Health,

HSE XXX,

Address

Tel: ….

**Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**RE: Notification of a possible case of *Verotoxigenic E. coli (VTEC)* in an attendee at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Dear Proprietor / Manager,**

The Department of Public Health, HSE-XXX has been notified of a possible case of **Verotoxigenic *E. coli (VTEC)*** - a type of serious gastrointestinal infection – in an attendee at your childcare facility.

VTEC is potentially a very serious infection. It usually causes diarrhoea (which may contain blood) and stomach cramps. In some individuals, most commonly children (but also elderly people), it may cause severe complications including kidney failure (called HUS or haemolytic uraemic syndrome).

The VTEC bacteria, which cause the infection, are passed in the infected person’s stools. The infection can then be spread from person-to-person, particularly between small children, if toilet hygiene/hand washing is inadequate. It takes very few VTEC bacteria to cause infection, especially in small children, so even a slight insufficiency in hygiene can be enough to spread infection. Contamination of hands with stool can allow the bacteria to spread, for instance, when children handle toys and play together. Once hands are contaminated, the bacteria can be swallowed if there is direct contact with the mouth or if food is handled and then eaten.

Rapid Public Health action is required to prevent possible spread of these VTEC bacteria. The actions that we will take are in line with national policy, as outlined on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre’s website at:

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Gastroenteric/VTEC/Guidance/ReportoftheHPSCSub-CommitteeonVerotoxigenicEcoli/>

You will be kept informed as to what is happening. **A complete listing of the names and contact details of all children and staff at your facility will be required to assist in the investigation.**

**Public Health Actions**

1. **Determining if there is an outbreak**

An immediate risk assessment is necessary to establish if there is an outbreak occurring at the facility. Management’s awareness of any recent diarrhoeal illness among children or staff is crucial. You will be asked about this by the investigating Senior Medical Officer.

1. **Alert all to report symptoms / give advice on prevention**

It is critically important that everyone is aware of the potential seriousness of this infection, what to look out for, what to do if any VTEC symptoms are suspected, of the necessity to alert the Department of Public Health of any recent diarrhoeal symptoms and of the importance of handwashing in reducing the risk of spread.

**Can you please immediately circulate the attached public health letter all parents and staff.** It is crucial that the parents of ALL children who attend your childcare facility receive this letter (even if they spend only an hour or two a week in your care). Every parent whose child spent any time at all in your childcare facility needs to be contacted.

This letter requests all parents of children who have had diarrhoea (including bloody diarrhoea) in the week following the last attendance by the possible VTEC case at your childcare facility (i.e. in the week following DD/MM/YY) to inform the Department of Public Health. These children will then have a stool sample taken to determine if they have been infected with VTEC.

**NB:** it is important that you would alert Public Health Staff of any absenteeism among children and staff as this might be due to possible VTEC infection.

If any additional children (or staff) are found to have VTEC (or bloody diarrhoea), then this means that there is an outbreak of VTEC in your childcare facility, and ALL children and staff will need to be tested for VTEC. Stool sampling kits will be organised by the Department of Public Health. Specialist laboratory testing of stool samples will be done by the Reference Laboratory in Dublin.

1. **If an outbreak is suspected at any stage during the investigation**

If the public health risk assessment indicates at any stage during the investigation that a VTEC outbreak is occurring, then the most effective way to manage the outbreak is to prevent contact between the children and with staff until laboratory testing shows that they are not infected.

In this event, all children and staff will have to provide **two stool samples (at least 48hrs apart)** for laboratory testing.

**All will be advised that they should not attend this or any other childcare facility until two consecutive negative stool results have been reported by the laboratory. Only then can we be sure that these VTEC bacteria are not being carried in anyone’s stool.**

**Individuals can subsequently return to the facility provided:**

**(1) they have been given the ‘all clear’ on their results by the Public Health Department *and***

**(2) that a representative of the Outbreak Control Team is satisfied with inspection of the facility *and***

**(3) that any deep environmental cleaning has taken place as advised *and***

**(4) that there are sufficient staff who have been given the ‘all clear’ to permit the children who have been deemed clear to return *and***

**(5) that the Outbreak Control Team is satisfied that there is no evidence of ongoing risk of VTEC infection associated with the childcare facility.**

The notification of VTEC in an attendee at any childcare facility, and the necessary subsequent investigation, can generate a great deal of anxiety. However, all efforts are concentrated on the prevention of spread of the VTEC bacteria because the safety of young children (who are at particular risk from this infection), and staff, is of paramount concern.

Your cooperation is appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Medical Council Registration No: