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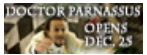
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Agency Approves First Use of Viruses as a Food Additive

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
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WASHINGTON, Aug. 18 (AP) — A mix of bacteria-killing [viruses](#) may be sprayed on cold cuts, wieners and sausages to combat common microbes that kill hundreds of people a year, federal health officials ruled Friday.

The ruling, by the [Food and Drug Administration](#), is the first approval of viruses as a food additive, said Andrew Zajac of the Office of Food Additive Safety at the agency.

Treatments that use bacteriophages to attack harmful bacteria have been a part of folk medicine for hundreds of years in India and for decades in the former Soviet Union.

The approved mix of six viruses is intended to be sprayed onto ready-to-eat meat and poultry products, including sliced ham and turkey, said John Vazzana, the president and chief executive of Intralytix, which developed the additive.

The viruses, called bacteriophages, are meant to kill strains of the *Listeria monocytogenes* bacterium, the food agency said.

The bacterium can cause a serious infection called listeriosis, primarily in pregnant women, newborns and adults with weakened immune systems. In the United States, an estimated 2,500 people become seriously ill with listeriosis each year, according to the federal [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Of those, 500 die.

Luncheon meats are particularly vulnerable to *Listeria* because after they are bought they are typically not cooked or reheated, which can kill harmful bacteria like *Listeria*, Mr. Zajac said.

The preparation of bacteriophages — the name is from the Greek for “bacteria eater” — attacks only strains of the *Listeria* bacterium and not human or plant cells, the food agency said.

“As long as it used in accordance with the regulations, we have concluded it’s safe,” Mr. Zajac said.

People normally come into contact with bacteriophages through food, water and the environment, and they are found in our digestive tracts, the agency said.

Consumers will not be aware which meat and poultry products have been treated with the spray, Mr. Zajac said. The Department of Agriculture will regulate the actual use of the product.

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The viruses are grown in a preparation of the very bacteria they kill, and then purified. The food agency had concerns that the virus preparation could contain toxic residues from the bacteria, but testing did not reveal residues, which in small quantities are not likely to cause health problems anyway, the agency said.

“The F.D.A. is applying one of the toughest food-safety standards which they have to find this is safe,” said Caroline Smith DeWaal, director of food safety for the [Center for Science in the Public Interest](#), a consumer advocacy group. “They couldn’t approve this product if they had questions about its safety.”

Intralix, based in Baltimore, first petitioned the food agency in 2002 to allow the viruses to be used as an additive. It has since licensed the product to a multinational company, which intends to market it worldwide, Mr. Vazzana said.

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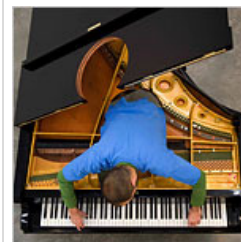
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