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**Microbiology of food and animal feeding  
stuffs — Horizontal method for the  
detection and enumeration of  
coliforms — Most probable number  
technique**

*Microbiologie des aliments — Méthode horizontale pour la recherche et  
le dénombrement des coliformes — Technique du nombre le plus  
probable*



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## Foreword

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International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO 4831 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 34, *Food products*, Subcommittee SC 9, *Microbiology*.

This third edition of ISO 4831 cancels and replaces ISO 4831:1991 and ISO 5541-2:1986. Clauses 4, 9 and 10 of ISO 4831:1991 have been technically revised. The main changes are as follows:

- the alternative procedure of incubation at 35 °C has been deleted;
- detection and enumeration of coliforms are covered (Clauses 4 and 9);
- description of the MPN and the CCT have been omitted (Clause 10) and reference is given to ISO 7218.

Considering the nature of the changes to the previous edition of this International Standard, it is considered that the validation of alternative methods based on ISO 4831:1991 is not affected by this revision.

## Introduction

Because of the large variety of food and feed products, this horizontal method may not be appropriate in every detail for certain products. In this case, different methods, which are specific to these products, may be used if absolutely necessary for justified technical reasons. Nevertheless, every attempt should be made to apply this horizontal method as far as possible.

When this International Standard is next reviewed, account will be taken of all information then available regarding the extent to which this horizontal method has been followed and the reasons for deviations from this method in the case of particular products.

The harmonization of test methods cannot be immediate and, for certain groups of products, International Standards and/or national standards may already exist that do not comply with this horizontal method. It is hoped that when such standards are reviewed they will be changed to comply with this International Standard so that eventually the only remaining departures from this horizontal method will be those necessary for well-established technical reasons.

The technique described in this International Standard is less precise than that described in ISO 4832 <sup>[1]</sup>, but allows a microbiological examination to be carried out on a larger test portion, thus permitting a lower number of coliforms per gram or per millilitre of product to be detected. Moreover, since the definition of “coliforms” adopted in the two documents is different, the microorganisms enumerated are not necessarily the same.

For any particular product, the method to be chosen will be specified in the International Standard dealing with that product.

For the purposes of a practicable test method, the definition of “coliforms” given in Clause 3 and used as the basis for the procedure is not necessarily identical to corresponding definitions given in other published texts. A proportion of strains of the microorganisms described in other published texts as “coliforms” (including *Escherichia coli*) fail to produce enough gas to be detectable by use of a Durham tube (i.e. “anaerogenic strains”). Therefore the method described in this International Standard will not detect all strains of the microorganisms referred to in other publications as “(presumptive) coliforms” (e.g. certain strains of *Citrobacter*, *Enterobacter*, *Klebsiella*) (see Reference [2]).

# Microbiology of food and animal feeding stuffs — Horizontal method for the detection and enumeration of coliforms — Most probable number technique

## 1 Scope

This International Standard gives general guidelines for the detection and the enumeration of coliforms. It is applicable to

- products intended for human consumption and for the feeding of animals, and
- environmental samples in the area of food production and food handling.

Enumeration is carried out by calculation of the most probable number (MPN) after incubation in a liquid medium at 30 °C or 37 °C.

NOTE The temperature is subject to agreement between the parties concerned. In the case of milk and milk products, the temperature of incubation is 30 °C.

This enumeration method is applicable when the number sought is expected to be in the range 1 to 100 per millilitre or per gram of test sample.

A limitation on the applicability of this International Standard is imposed by the susceptibility of the method to a large degree of variability. The information given in Clause 11 provides guidance on the applicability of the method and on the interpretation of the results.

## 2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application 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 6887 (all parts), *Microbiology of food and animal feeding stuffs — Preparation of test samples, initial suspension and decimal dilutions for microbiological examination*

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

ISO 8261, *Milk and milk products — General guidance for the preparation of test samples, initial suspensions and decimal dilutions for microbiological examination*

ISO/TS 11133-1, *Microbiology of food and animal feeding stuffs — Guidelines on preparation and production of culture media — Part 1: General guidelines on quality assurance for the preparation of culture media in the laboratory*

ISO/TS 11133-2:2003, *Microbiology of food and animal feeding stuffs — Guidelines on preparation and production of culture media — Part 2: Practical guidelines on performance testing of culture media*