

**Consumer knowledge about aspects of food hygiene and food safety.
Results of a nationwide survey in Germany.**

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As in many countries the incidence of outbreaks of foodborne disease in Germany has increased considerably within the last years (e.g. since 1980 salmonellosis has tripled). The reasons for that are manifold, but a main area of concern is improper food handling of the consumer, e.g. a neglect of basic rules in food hygiene.

In order to obtain up-to-date information on consumer knowledge and practices about aspects of food hygiene and food safety the Institute of Nutritional Economics and Sociology of the Federal Research Center for Nutrition, Stuttgart-Kohenheim, designed and developed a national consumer survey, which was conducted by GfM-GETAS, Hamburg (a commercial marketing research organisation) in November 1992 (sample size 2500; German-speaking residents; random route; <=14y of age). The questionnaire (12 items) was pretested and included the following major areas: handling of frozen and cooled foods during purchase, transport, storage and preparation; knowledge of rules in food hygiene; and perception of different health risks concerning food and nutrition. The interviews were carried out within an omnibus survey, which includes standard sociodemographic information.

Since salmonellosis was an important issue in the German mass medias within the previous months the results show 83% of the German population know this foodborne disease. Even 45% name tapeworm infestations and 32% trichinellosis. Many Germans associate Salmonella with raw egg (87%), poultry (68%), meat (51%), minced meat (48%) and dressings (46%). Although in almost all German households there are refrigerators (99%) and deep-freezing devices (69%), too many people neglect the common rules in the daily routine of handling food. Only a fifth (18%) pays attention to the shelf-life date of frozen food. More than half of the population (57%) transport the bought, chilled foods home without any protection. A minority (6%) controls the temperature of the deep freezer, and 58% do not know the actual temperature of their refrigerator. Too many (45%) thaw their frozen food improperly, e.g. just keeping it overnight at room temperature. In an applied food hygiene test (9 items) nobody could reach maximum score. Too many people are of the wrong opinion that they are able to perceive foodborne infections by their own senses (taste, smell, appearance).

The survey results indicate an obvious lack of concern and knowledge of the good rules of proper food hygiene during daily household activities. A further analysis of the data shows, that this is in principle true for almost all population groups independent of sex, age, education, income and region.

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