

Report of the Social Science Research Committee on Listeria and the food storage and handling practices of the over 60s

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Background

- Report produced at request of FSA, on recommendation from the ACMSF Ad Hoc Group on Vulnerable groups
- Response to increased incidence of listeriosis among those aged over 60 in the UK
- SSRC agreed to advise on what existing evidence could be reanalysed and what new research might be commissioned
- Explore what food older people consume, how they store and prepare it and whether this is increasing their risk of listeriosis
- Cannot help explain the increase due to lack of historical, behavioural data.

Approach

- Preliminary literature search
- Small number of interviews with relevant experts
- Inspecting a range of existing data sets available for secondary analysis
- Developing recommendations for reviewing existing research and for new primary research
- Not a comprehensive review of existing literature and no primary research conducted

Findings from preliminary review of literature

- Limited and fragmented research effort to date, topics often investigated in isolation
- Topics include:
 - food and aging
 - lifestage and lifestyle factors
 - food safety practices
- Very few studies focus specifically on shopping, consumption and preparation behaviours and how they impact on food safety
- Diversity of over 60s evident, although not considered in detail in available literature

Proposed next steps

1. Undertake a more comprehensive literature review

- To include a broader range of social scientific disciplines
- Explore topics such as meals on wheels, care home and institutional settings
- Understand better the influence of ageing on people's health and (subsequently) food practices
- Wider search for relevant international work, including research response of other countries seeing an increase in *Listeria* cases
- Scope to include secondary analysis of existing data sets, depending on ACMSF priorities

Proposed next steps

2. Primary Research

- i. Stand-alone survey – baseline data of food handling practices of the over 60s
- ii. These data could be captured to some extent as part of the FSA's new Food Issues Survey (c. 500 respondents aged over 60)
Opportunity to explore behaviours of key groups of interest following the survey
- iii. Household study of those who have contracted listeriosis (to include relatives, carers etc)
- iv. Detailed study of key stakeholders
- v. Exploration of changes in retail environment

Determining the next steps

- Understanding causes of future changes in listeriosis: survey of over 60s and follow up behavioural study, stand-alone and/or via FIS
- Understanding how food-related practices may increase vulnerability among the over 60s: household study of those who have contracted listeriosis
- Stakeholder study and exploration of changing retail environment are important but not priorities
- Cross-disciplinary partnership will be important in commissioning any future work

Questions?