

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

Dr Michael Howard  
Professor Peter Jackson

24<sup>th</sup> September 2009

### 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?