

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

DISCUSSION PAPER

**REPORT OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP ON
LISTERIA MONOCYTOGENES AND THE FOOD STORAGE AND FOOD HANDLING
PRACTICES OF THE OVER 60s AT HOME**

The ACMSF Ad Hoc Group on Vulnerable Groups report on the increased incidence of listeriosis in the UK was published in September 2009¹. One of the report's recommendations was for the report to be sent to the FSA's expert Social Science Research Committee (SSRC) to consider the food behaviour, storage and handling practices of elderly people in the home.

The SSRC Working Group on Listeria produced its report (*L.monocytogenes* and food storage and food handling practices of the over 60s at home) which was presented to the ACMSF in September 2009². As no specific recommendation was recorded in the minutes of the September 2009 ACMSF meeting³, the SSRC has requested a formal response to their report.

Members are invited to comment:

- whether ACMSF recommends a particular priority as discussed under paragraph 4 above
- whether they agree that the FSA should consider, as appropriate, the recommendations of the SSRC paper in its research planning and prioritisation

**Secretariat
March 2010**

¹ Available at <http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2009/sep/acmsflisteria>

² Available at <http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/committee/acm954ssrcprep.pdf>

³ Available at <http://acmsf.food.gov.uk/acmsfmeets/acmsf2009/acmsf240909/acmsfmin240909>

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

REPORT OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP ON *LISTERIA MONOCYTOGENES* AND THE FOOD STORAGE AND FOOD HANDLING PRACTICES OF THE OVER 60s AT HOME

Issue

1. To provide a formal response to the Social Science Research Committee to its report on *L.monocytogenes* and food storage and food handling practices of the over 60s at home which was presented to the ACMSF in September 2009.

Recommendations from the SSRC paper

2. The SSRC paper recommended that before considering whether to embark on new primary research it will be important to commission a full, thorough and critical appraisal of a wider range of literature on relevant topics in the social sciences.
3. It also made specific recommendations for primary research depending on the priorities of the FSA as follows:
 - i. a specially designed **independent social survey** to provide accurate baseline data on knowledge of food safety and food handling practices among the over 60's in the UK.
 - ii. this survey could be designed to lock onto the FSA's new Food Issues Survey (FIS). If consent is sought, both of these survey options would provide the opportunity **to follow up specific groups of people** who have characteristics of interest in a more detailed exploration of beliefs about food, safety and kitchen hygiene and/or of **actual behaviour in the home**.
 - iii. a **household based study** of those aged 60 and above **who have contracted listeriosis** (undertaken in collaboration with the Health Protection Agency) to establish the socio-demographic characteristics, lifestyle factors and food practices of those who have contracted listeriosis in the recent past
 - iv. a detailed **study of key stakeholders** to uncover their views about (a) current provision of food safety and health advice to those of 60 years of age and above (b) the identification of best practice and (c) the best means of encouraging and supporting best practice
 - v. to gain a better understanding of the effect of any recent changes in the retail environment (eg changes in pack size, special offers) on the food purchasing and consumption practices of the elderly, **further research with food retailers** would be required (including analysis of existing datasets and new interview-based research).
4. The paper proposed that if the FSA's main concern regarding social science research is to understand the causes of future changes in listeriosis among the elderly, then i) and ii) above should be regarded as a high priority, whereas if it is to understand the health effects of current food-related practices among the elderly, then iii) and/or iv) are higher priorities. Though important v) is unlikely to be so high a priority.

Update on current situation

5. In connection with recommendation ii above, a number of questions on food safety behaviours will be included in wave 1 of the Food Issues Survey which is due to commence in March 2010. This is a robust survey of c.3000 adults across the UK which will measure public attitudes, knowledge and behaviours towards food issues. There will be sufficient interviews with the over 60s to allow for analysis of the findings amongst this group specifically and provision has been made to allow follow up studies amongst groups of interest who have given their permission to be re-contacted. Findings from this first wave will be available at the end of 2010.
6. The FSA's Social Science Research Unit is also developing a specification for an evidence review of food safety behaviours in the home which will include a specific focus on vulnerable groups and will potentially include a small number of interviews with health professionals to explore dissemination of food safety advice to vulnerable groups. This will not just focus on issues associated with *Listeria monocytogenes*. The review will commence in May 2010 and is expected to report in October 2010.

Action

7. Members are invited to comment on:
 - whether ACMSF recommends a particular priority as discussed under paragraph 4 above
 - whether they agree that the FSA should consider, as appropriate, the recommendations of the SSRC paper in its research planning and prioritisation