Pregnant Women’s and Seniors’ Storage Practices for Refrigerated Ready-to-Eat Foods: Results of a Web-Enabled Panel Survey

Sheryl Cates, BA1; Katherine Kosa, MS1; Shawn Karns, BA1; Sandria Godwin, PhD, RD2; and Delores Chambers, PhD3

Conducted nationally representative Web-enabled panel survey to collect data on refrigerator storage and hazards for ready-to-eat foods and other RTE foods among selected categories of RTE foods. Thus, better data on home storage and hazards for ready-to-eat foods is needed to understand consumers’ practices and to develop educational programs on home storage.

### 1. Introduction

Consumption of food contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes can cause listeriosis, an infection that predominantly affects seniors. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have a zero tolerance policy for L. monocytogenes in meat and other RTE foods. We found that only 15% of seniors and 9% of pregnant women owned a refrigerator thermometer to monitor refrigerator temperature. Other researchers have reported lower rates of refrigerator thermometer ownership (24% to 33% of respondents). Some consumers may not use their refrigerators when handling refrigerated RTE foods. Thus, better data on home storage and hazards for ready-to-eat foods is needed to understand consumers’ practices and to develop educational programs on home storage.

### 2. Purpose

1. Conducted nationally representative Web-enabled survey to collect data on refrigerator storage and hazards for ready-to-eat foods.
2. Collected data to provide more focused attention on pregnant women and seniors, who are at risk for listeriosis and the remaining population.

### 3. Study Design

**Sample Design**

- Conducted nationally representative Web-enabled panel survey to collect data on refrigerator storage and hazards for ready-to-eat foods.

- Selected a random sample of 754 respondents (50% seniors and 50% pregnant women) from the U.S. population using a stratified random sampling method. The sample was stratified by region (Northeast, South, Midwest, and West) and age (18 to 24, 25 to 39, 40 to 59, 60 or older).

- The sample included 377 seniors (125 men, 126 women, and 126 women) and 377 pregnant women (125 men, 126 women, and 126 women). The sample was stratified by age and race.

- The sample was obtained from a Web-enabled panel survey that provides a representative sample of the U.S. population on a daily basis.

- The survey was conducted from October 1 to October 15, 2005, and a total of 249 completed surveys were collected from pregnant women and seniors.

### 4. Results

**A. Refrigerator Thermometer Ownership and Recommended Refrigerator Temperatures**

- Only 15% of seniors and 9% of pregnant women owned a refrigerator thermometer to monitor refrigerator temperature. Other researchers have reported lower rates of refrigerator thermometer ownership (24% to 33% of respondents). Some consumers may not use their refrigerators when handling refrigerated RTE foods. Thus, better data on home storage and hazards for ready-to-eat foods is needed to understand consumers’ practices and to develop educational programs on home storage.

**B. Storage Practices for Refrigerated RTE Foods**

- More respondents had purchased hamburger, bagged salad, and pre-sliced cold cuts compared with pre-sliced deli meats, cold frozen vegetables, and vacuum-packed luncheon meats. Thus, better data on home storage and hazards for ready-to-eat foods is needed to understand consumers’ practices and to develop educational programs on home storage.

### 5. Discussion

- More respondents rely on theU.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for information on food safety and listeriosis. The results of this study show that better data on home storage and hazards for ready-to-eat foods is needed to understand consumers’ practices and to develop educational programs on home storage.

**References**


