

Study: [Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice of the Use of Irradiated Meat among Respondents to the FoodNet Population Survey in Connecticut and New York](#)

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Despite endorsement from numerous health organizations including the World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the American Medical Association, irradiated products have been slow to appear on supermarket shelves. Published in the October 2006 edition of the *Journal of Food Protection*, a FoodNet study describes factors that affect consumer knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards irradiated meat products.

The Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, or FoodNet, is a collaborative sentinel site surveillance program for foodborne infections conducted under the auspices of the CDC's Emerging Infections Program. A random-digit dialing telephone survey of residents of FoodNet sites, conducted in 2002-2003, asked residents of the Connecticut and New York sites about food safety and irradiated meat.

Thirty-seven percent of 3,104 respondents knew that irradiated fresh meat was available for purchase, however, only 2% found the product where they shopped. Ninety-four percent of respondents understood that bacteria on raw meat could contaminate other food and a majority (55%) also understood that irradiation kills bacteria. However, 62% responded they were unsure about the safety of irradiation. Knowledge that irradiated fresh meat was available for purchase was significantly influenced by whether a respondent lived in a county with one or more grocery stores operated by Chain A, which had actively promoted the sale of irradiated fresh ground beef during the survey period. After adjusting for other factors, respondents living in a county with Chain A were more likely to know that irradiated products could be purchased than respondents living in other counties (odds ratio 1.8; 95% confidence interval 1.4-2.4).

The data from this analysis strongly suggest that there is a general lack of consumer knowledge concerning the availability and safety of irradiated meat. Knowledge about bacteria and the effect of irradiation on bacteria may affect practice and attitude toward these products. Clearly, education can impact and improve people's awareness and can address concerns. Finally, this study has shown the impact a food retailer can have in raising the demand and awareness of safer food products like irradiated ground beef.

The issues of food safety and associated illness are ongoing and need to be addressed at the level of the consumer. Public health should continue to actively demonstrate the benefits of irradiation, address concerns and fears, and help promote irradiated meat so that consumers are fully informed of the choices they can make to further protect themselves from foodborne illness.