

Research Findings Related to Safe Cooking

In July 1998, FDA, CDC and USDA convened a meeting on Food Safety Education: Research and Strategies. The following are research findings presented at that meeting which are pertinent to the *Cook It Safely* message of National Food Safety Education MonthSM, 1999.

➤ The results of a telephone survey of behavioral risk factors for foodborne disease indicated that a significant percentage of consumers surveyed were at risk of foodborne disease from eating runny eggs (18%) or preferring pink hamburgers (30%). Hispanics, younger adults, men and people of higher income and higher education practiced more risky behaviors than others did. Older adults and people with less education were most likely to eat runny eggs.

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➤ Data from FDA-USDA Food Safety Surveys (random digit-dialed telephone surveys carried out in 1988, 1993, and 1998) indicate:

- While the percentage of people who view chicken and red meat as high-risk foods has sharply increased in the past 5 years, concern about other foods, such as shellfish and eggs, has not increased as much.
- Increases over the past 5 years in perceived risk of foodborne illness were particularly associated with women, older persons (i.e., 26+), African-Americans, and people of lesser education. The increases in risk perception in these groups were greater than those shown by men, younger persons, whites, and people with higher education.

- Young people, 18-25, do not show an increased perception of risk and have gone, in fact, from the age group with the highest concern to that with the lowest concern.
- Half of the respondents to the 1998 Survey said they owned a meat thermometer — more owned the type used for large roasts (27%) than instant-read thermometers (20%). Only 3% of people who cook meat said they often check the temperature of hamburgers, while another 3% said they sometimes check hamburger temperature with a thermometer.

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➤ An annual telephone survey, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), in addition to a core of questions asked nationally every year, allows individual states to include modules on topics of concern. Seven states asked questions from a food safety module, 1992 through 1996. Among the results:

- Eating raw oysters was much more common on the eastern seaboard. Warning posters above raw oyster bars were ineffective.
- Point of sale food safety information did not reach the Hispanic population.
- Consumption of undercooked eggs was highest among older people.

Altekruse SF, Yang S, Timbo BB, Angulo FJ. A multi-state survey of consumer food-handling practices Am J Prev Med 1999; 16: 21—21.