

Survey on knowledge and behaviours towards smoked fish: executive summary

Results available: Results available

Area of research interest: [Behaviour and perception](#)

Research topics: [Social science](#)

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Conducted by: Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland

DOI: <https://doi.org/>

Project status: Completed

'Vulnerable consumers' definition

For this piece of work, 'vulnerable consumers' are consumers who are at higher risk of food poisoning caused by the bacteria *Listeria* when eating ready-to-eat (RTE) smoked fish products (compared to the general population), for example, consumers with weakened immune systems, who are pregnant, and older people particularly those aged over 65. For brevity, this group is referred to as 'vulnerable consumers' throughout the report, except where differences are compared between consumers with weakened immune systems and consumers aged over 65.

Awareness of RTE smoked fish

- overall, across the UK, awareness and knowledge of hot-smoked fish is low, with 26% saying that they have heard of it and know what it is. A further 17% have heard of hot-smoked fish but don't know what it is. Awareness and knowledge of cold-smoked fish is higher, with just under half (44%) of consumers saying that they have heard of cold-smoked fish and also know what it is. A further 19% have heard of cold-smoked fish but don't know what it is.
- when comparing across nations, awareness of both cold-smoked and hot-smoked fish is higher in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK (59% Scotland vs 43% in the rest of the UK for cold-smoked fish and 40% Scotland vs 25% in the rest of the UK for hot-smoked fish).
- among those previously familiar with each type of smoked fish, a large majority said that their understanding matched the description provided in the survey (both 91%).
- consumers overall are more divided on whether they knew before participating in the survey that cold-smoked fish and hot-smoked fish were two different types of products. This was also seen among vulnerable consumers.
- however, people in Scotland were also more likely to say that they knew cold-smoked fish and hot-smoked fish were two different types of products before taking part (58% in Scotland vs 47% in the rest of the UK).
- awareness of the risks of food poisoning caused by the bacteria *Listeria* when eating RTE smoked fish is low overall (34% said that they previously knew that some groups of people are at higher risk).
- among vulnerable consumers, those aged 65-75 years are less aware of the risks (27 vs 34% of consumers overall). Conversely, there is greater awareness of these risks among those with a weakened immune system (41%).

Consumption of RTE smoked fish

- most consumers say that they do not generally prepare cold-smoked (62%) or hot-smoked fish (63%) at home. People in Scotland are more likely to prepare both types of smoked fish at home.
- around half of consumers eat cold-smoked fish (51%) and hot-smoked fish (48%) at least once a year. Consumption patterns differ across nations and vulnerable consumers. For instance, consumption of smoked fish is higher in Scotland and lower among older consumers aged 65-75 across the UK.
- there are differences in the ways consumers report eating cold-smoked and hot-smoked fish: cold-smoked fish is usually eaten cold, without being cooked through beforehand, while hot-smoked fish is usually eaten cooked through until steaming hot.
- ways of consuming smoked fish are generally consistent across UK nations. However, people in Scotland are more likely to report eating hot-smoked fish cold compared to the rest of the UK.
- among vulnerable consumers, those with a weakened immune system are more likely to report consuming cold-smoked fish cooked through until steaming hot.

Response to risk communications and advice

The following wording was included in the questionnaire to outline the current government advice at the time:

Current government advice is for people with a weakened immune system, including those who are pregnant or aged over 65, to thoroughly cook RTE smoked fish before eating it to avoid listeriosis.

- awareness of the current government advice is low, with a minority of consumers being fully aware (15%) and most not aware (60%).
- levels of awareness are consistent across the UK, with similar proportions not aware of the current government advice in Scotland (59%) and in the rest of the UK (60%).
- when comparing different types of vulnerable consumers, older consumers aged 65-75 report lowest awareness of government advice than those with a weakened immune system.
- views are divided among vulnerable consumers who currently eat cold- and hot-smoked fish about whether they would follow government advice to thoroughly cook smoked fish before eating it.
- overall, more say they would follow the advice for hot-smoked fish than cold-smoked fish, reflecting consumer preferences for how to eat each type of product.
- among vulnerable consumers, those with a weakened immune system are more likely to say they would follow government advice.
- previous knowledge of government advice appears to make some difference to self-reported likelihood to follow the advice when it comes to consuming cold-smoked fish. However, consumption preferences could also be influencing people's attitudes towards adopting the advice.