

GermS in the kitchen: Salmonella better known than Campylobacter

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This scanning electron microscope image shows the characteristic spiral, or corkscrew, shape of *C. jejuni* cells and related structures. Credit: De Wood; digital colorization by Chris Pooley/ Public Domain

What health risks are consumers aware of? What are they concerned about? The answers to these questions are provided by the BfR Consumer Monitor, a representative population survey conducted regularly by the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR). On the one hand it reflects the public perception in Germany with regard to consumer health protection topics, while on the other hand it is an essential indicator for recognizing possible false estimations on the part of the general public early on.

In the latest issue, it can again be seen that consumers often underestimate risks which are classified as [health](#)-relevant from the point of view of [risk assessment](#), such as [food](#) hygiene at home. One new topic is the question of awareness of several pathogens in the food sector. "While most people have heard of Salmonella, only a minority has heard of *Campylobacter*," explains BfR President Professor Dr. Dr. Andreas Hensel. "This is despite the fact that *Campylobacter* is by now the most common bacterial pathogen of [intestinal infections](#) in Germany". The view of consumers that food in Germany is safe has hardly changed, while smoking, climate and environmental pollution, unhealthy or wrong diet and alcohol are still perceived as the greatest health risks.

The BfR Consumer Monitor is an important consumer health protection tool. As a representative consumer survey, it gives an insight every six months as to how the German-speaking population perceives health risks. To do so, roughly 1,000 persons living in private households in Germany who are at least 14 years of age are interviewed by telephone

on behalf of the BfR.

Each issue is structured in a similar way so that the results of the individual surveys can be compared with one another. The BfR Consumer Monitor is dedicated on the one hand to topics which receive a lot of public attention. On the other hand it analyses questions which have not so much been the focus of attention but are also of relevance. One example is the new method of "genome editing" which specifically modifies genetic material. The degree of trust in state structures of consumer health protection is also surveyed, as this can in turn influence the perception of risks.

The question concerning whether and to what extent public perception deviates from scientific estimations of health risks is of particular interest for the work of the BfR, as the Institute can then counteract false estimations or misunderstandings with communicative measures.

It is shown repeatedly that the general public is largely unaware of important consumer health protection topics, such as pyrrolizidine alkaloids in teas and honey, or wrongly classifies them as being of no concern, such as food hygiene in private households. A new question in the latest Consumer Monitor concerned awareness of several pathogens in the food sector. Accordingly, 95 percent of respondents know about *Salmonella* as opposed to only 22 percent who know about *Campylobacter*, even though the latter can also result in a foodborne disease known as campylobacteriosis. In Germany, *Campylobacter* has by now become the most common bacterial pathogen to cause intestinal infections.

With regard to the topic of the release of aluminium from menu trays, two thirds of respondents are currently aware of it and slightly over one third are concerned about it. Toys, textiles and cosmetics are estimated to be safe by a greater percentage of [consumers](#) than in the previous

survey.

Several consumer estimations have changed little compared to the last survey. The great majority of respondents continue to regard food in Germany as safe. When asked about the greatest [health risks](#), most of the respondents still mention smoking, climate and environmental pollution, along with an unhealthy or wrong diet, followed by alcohol and unhealthy or contaminated foods. When asked specifically about selected topics, Salmonella, genetically modified foods, antimicrobial resistance and residues of plant protection products head the list where awareness is concerned. These are also the four topics which cause concern among the majority of respondents.

Provided by BfR Federal Institute for Risk Assessment

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