



# Consumer Food Safety Practices: Raw Milk Consumption and Food Thermometer Use

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## What Is the Issue?

Consumers make choices that influence food safety risks, and providing them with recommendations on specific practices that reduce these risks could complement or substitute for additional Federal regulations and be a cost-effective tool for reducing the incidence of foodborne illness, provided consumers follow the advice. To better understand current food safety behaviors of consumers, this report examines the food safety practices of at-home meal preparers in the United States by investigating two recommendations of Government health and safety officials, as well as the broader food safety community: avoiding the consumption of raw (unpasteurized) milk and cooking meat to a verified recommended temperature using a food thermometer.

## What Did the Study Find?

From 2014 to 2016, the American Time Use Survey–Eating and Health Module (ATUS-EHM) posed questions to respondents regarding these safeguards: Was raw (unpasteurized) milk consumed or served in the previous 7 days? Was a food or meat thermometer used when preparing any meals with meat, poultry, or seafood in the previous 7 days? Using their responses, we estimate the prevalence of raw milk and thermometer use as well as the number of people at possible risk of foodborne illnesses on a typical or weekly basis.

- Each week, an estimated 2 percent of at-home meal preparers, or 3.2 million people (1.3 percent of the U.S. population age 18 or over) consumed or served raw milk.
- Of at-home meal preparers that consumed or served raw milk, 80 percent or 2.6 million people lived with at least 1 other person; 44 percent or 1.4 million had a spouse; 36 percent or 1.1 million lived with at least 1 child; and 28 percent or 0.9 million lived in a household with at least 1 person age 62 or older.
- Each week, an estimated 14 percent of at-home meal preparers, or 19.5 million people (7.9 percent of the U.S. population age 18 or over) used a food thermometer when preparing meals with meat, poultry, or seafood.
- Of at-home meal preparers who used a food thermometer, 87 percent or 17 million lived with at least 1 other person; 65 percent or 12.6 million had a spouse; 39 percent or 7.5 million lived with at least 1 child; and 30 percent or 5.8 million lived in a household with at least 1 person age 62 or older.

ERS is a primary source of economic research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.

- On average, at-home meal preparers who used food thermometers earned more than non-users, reported better physical health, were more likely to exercise, were more likely married, and had larger households compared to those who did not use food thermometers.
- At-home meal preparers whose occupation is related to food preparation were more likely to use a food thermometer, suggesting a potential link between mandatory on-the-job food safety training and food safety behavior at home.

## **How Was the Study Conducted?**

The estimates of at-home meal preparers in the United States were calculated based on responses to the 2014 to 2016 ATUS-EHM, which is uniquely suited for describing food safety behaviors of at-home meal preparers. The ATUS-EHM provides information to determine if a survey respondent was the usual at-home meal preparer. Additional responses can be used to describe at-home meal preparer food safety practices in the previous 7 days regarding their use of raw milk and food thermometers while preparing any meals featuring meat, poultry, or seafood. Since the ATUS-EHM is linked with the Current Population Survey (CPS), regional, economic, demographic, and health characteristics—as well as household size/ composition and occupation of at-home meal preparers—can be examined. Last, our results were weighted, following the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) guidelines, to produce estimates with greater precision, ensure the findings are a nationally representative analysis of at-home meal preparers in the United States, and account for the survey's complex design.