Identification of unique food handling practices that could represent food safety risks for minority consumers

Foodborne illness caused by *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* is a concern for consumers, and there is evidence that minority racial-ethnic populations experience greater rates of illness because of these pathogens. The limited body of research concerning food safety knowledge and practices among minority consumers has focused more on general food safety knowledge than on culturally specific food handling practices. The purpose of the research reported here was to explore food handling behaviors of minority racial-ethnic consumers through in-depth discussions in focus group settings. In this way, we hoped to identify potential unique, previously unidentified food handling practices among these consumers.

Nine focus groups were held in Philadelphia, PA. Three focus groups were conducted with African American consumers, three with Hispanic consumers, and three with Asian consumers. In all, 56 consumers participated. Data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for unique and potentially unsafe food handling behaviors. Potentially unsafe food handling practices identified among all three groups included extended time to transport food from retail to home and washing of raw poultry. Culturally unique behaviors within groups included (i) using hot water (Asian, Hispanic) or acidic solutions (African American, Hispanic) to clean raw poultry, (ii) purchasing live poultry (Asian, Hispanic), (iii) cooking poultry overnight (African American), and (iv) preparing bite-size pieces of meat prior to cooking (Asian, Hispanic). To have focus groups include a limited number of participants and nonrandom sampling means that these themes and trends cannot be extrapolated to represent food mishandling among these populations in general. Results presented here allow modification of an existing food safety survey to identify the prevalence of these food handling practices among consumers of different demographics.
A food safety-risk analysis is essential not only to produce or manufacture high quality goods and products to ensure safety and protect public health, but also to comply with international and national standards and market regulations. With risk analyses food safety systems can be
strengthened and food-borne illnesses can be reduced. Food safety risk analyses focus on major safety concerns in manufacturing premises—not every safety issue requires a formal risk analysis. Sometimes, especially for food in shops. 3.1. Can I get infected through the handling of food by people who may be infected? According to food safety agencies in the EU Member States, it is very unlikely that you can catch COVID-19 from handling food. The European Food Safety Authority stated in addition that there is currently no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus. Consumers should also play their role. As a general good hygiene practice, customers in shops should not handle food other than what they intend to purchase, so as to avoid contaminating it with any pathogen that may be present on their hands. 3.2. As a retailer, how can I protect myself and my clients from getting infected by other people when visiting my shop?