

Food & You 2 trends: Chapter 6: Eating at Home

Introduction

The FSA is responsible for protecting the public from foodborne diseases. This involves working with farmers, food producers and processors, and the retail and hospitality sectors to ensure that the food people buy is safe. The FSA gives practical guidance and recommendations to consumers on [food safety and hygiene](#) in the home.

This chapter provides an overview of respondents' knowledge and reported behaviours relating to food safety and other food-related behaviours between Wave 1 (July 2020 to October 2020) and Wave 8 (October 2023 to January 2024).

Cleaning

Handwashing in the home

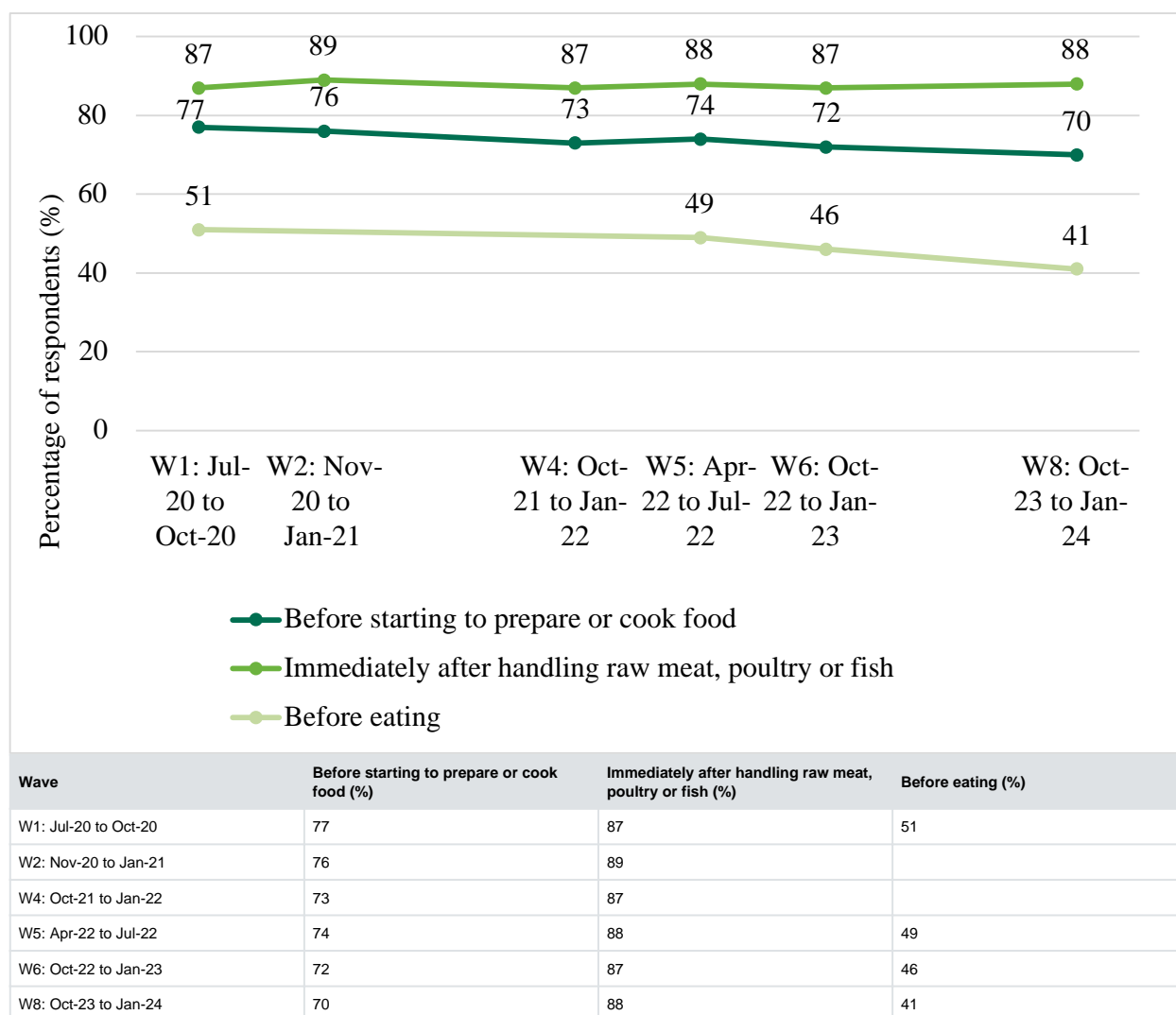
The [FSA recommends](#) that everyone should wash their hands before they prepare, cook or eat food, after handling raw food and before preparing ready-to-eat food.

There were no notable differences in the percentage of respondents who reported that they always wash their hands immediately after handling raw meat, poultry, or fish between Wave 1 and Wave 8, with around 4 in 5 respondents reporting that they always did this. However, there was a notable decline in the percentage of respondents who reported always washing their hands before preparing or cooking food, from 77% in Wave 1 to 70% in Wave 8 ([footnote 1](#)). Similarly, there was a notable decline in the percentage who reported always washing their hands before eating (from 51% in Wave 1 to 41% in Wave 8) (Figure 29) ([footnote 2](#)).

Figure 29. The percentage of respondents who always wash their hands.

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Food and You 2: Waves 1, 2, 4-6, 8

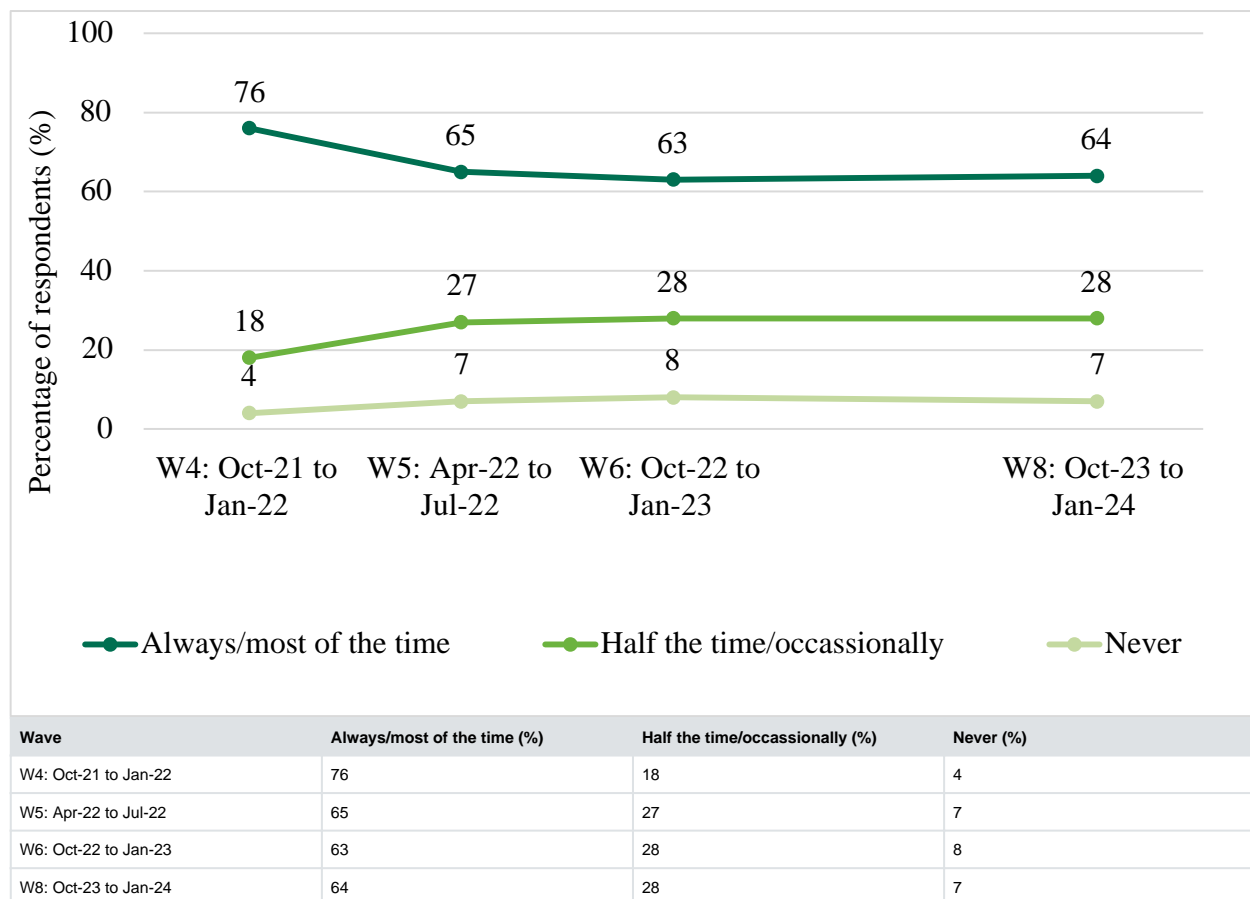
Handwashing when eating out

Respondents were asked, how often, if at all, they washed their hands or used hand sanitising gel or wipes before eating when they ate outside of their home ([footnote 3](#)). The percentage who reported doing this 'always' or 'most of the time' notably decreased from 76% in Wave 4 (October 2021 to January 2022) to 65% in Wave 5 (April 2022 to July 2022). Since then, the percentage has remained stable, with just over 6 in 10 respondents reporting that they wash their hands 'always' or 'most of the time' when eating outside the home each wave (Figure 30).

Figure 30. Percentage who always or most of the time wash their hands when eating outside of the home

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Food and You 2: Waves 4-6, 8

Chilling

If and how respondents check fridge temperature

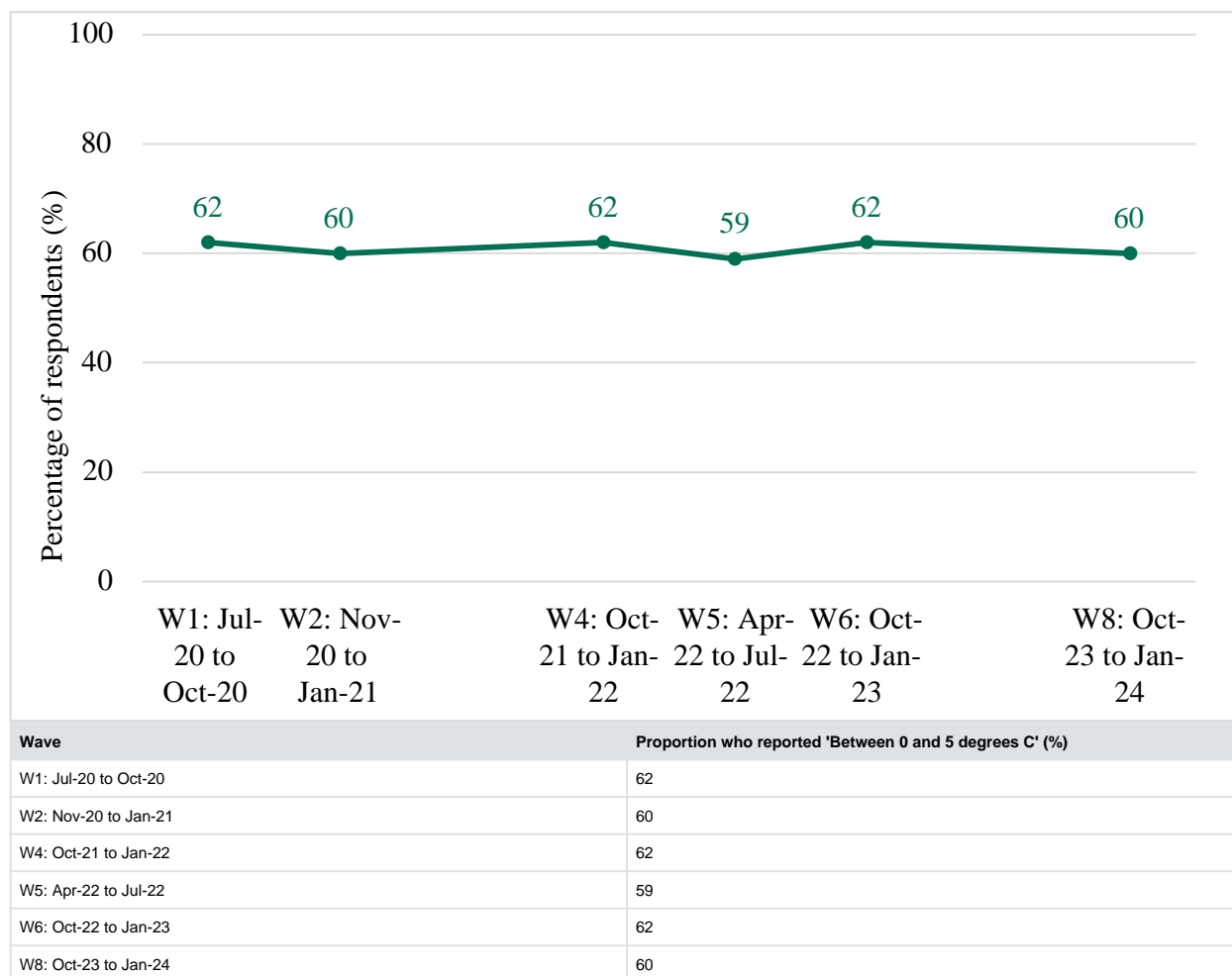
The FSA recommends that the [inside of a fridge should be between 0-5 degrees Celsius](#), and that the temperature should be checked weekly, using a fridge thermometer.

There were no notable differences in the percentage of respondents who reported the temperature on the inside of a fridge should be between 0-5 degrees Celsius between Wave 1 and Wave 8 (Figure 31) [\(footnote 4\)](#).

Figure 31. The percentage of respondents who think that the inside of a fridge should be between 0-5 degrees Celsius.

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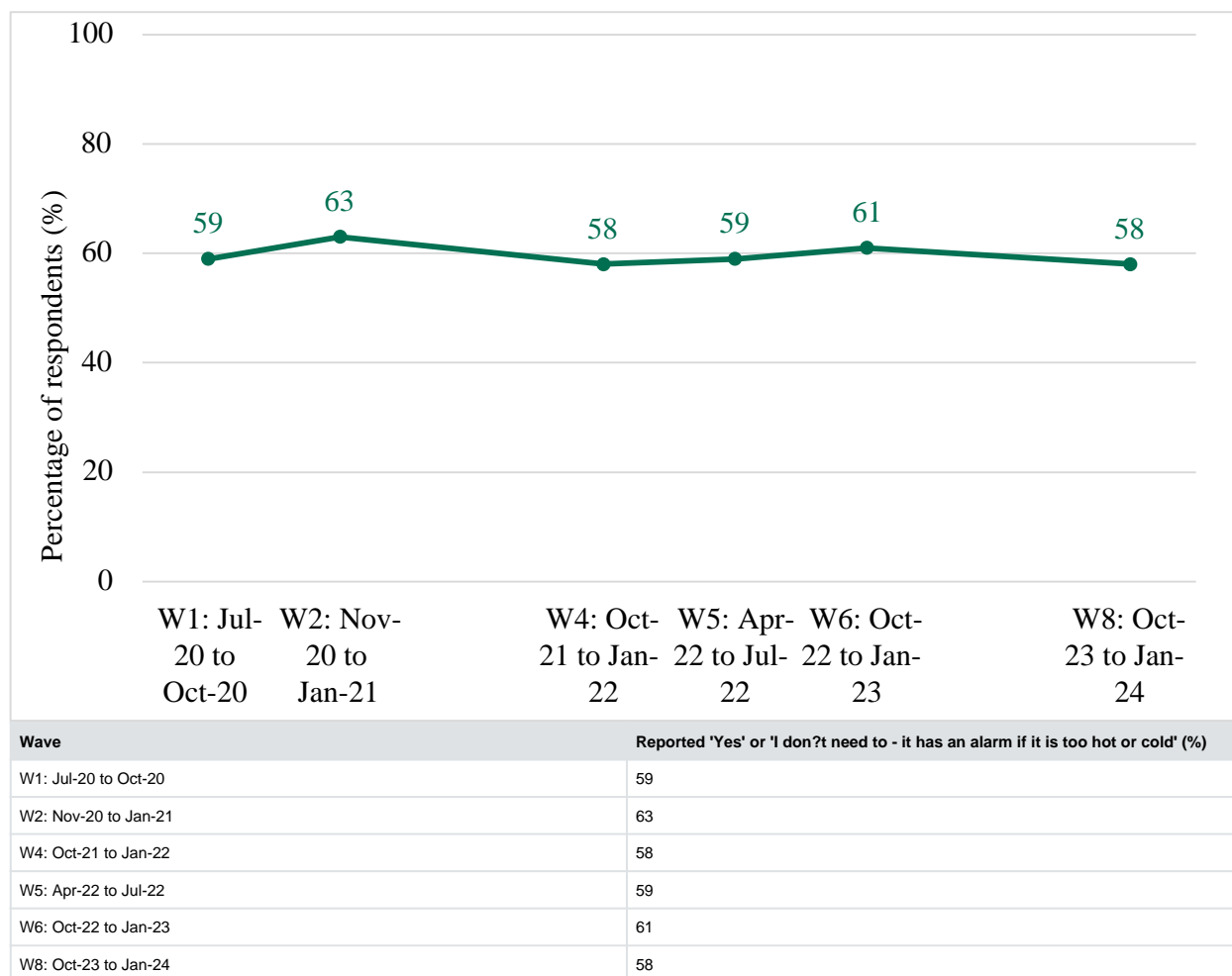
Food and You 2: Wave 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 8

Slightly more respondents reported that they check the temperature of their fridge, or do not need to as it has an alarm in Wave 2 (63%) compared to other waves**, however, generally there have been no other notable changes between Wave 1 and Wave 8 (Figure 32) [\(footnote 5\)](#).

Figure 32. The percentage of respondents who check the temperature of their fridge.

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Food and You 2: Wave 1, 2, 4-6, 8

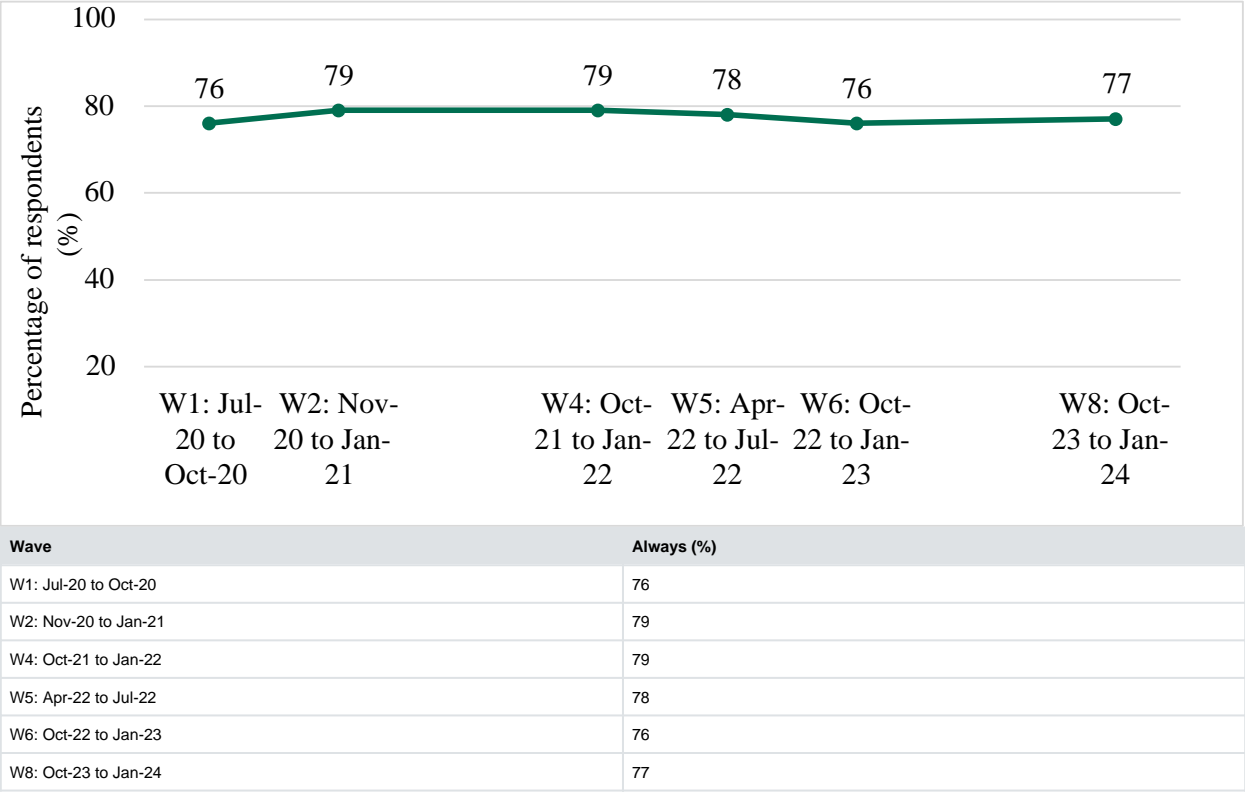
Cooking

The FSA recommends that [food is cooked until steaming hot and cooked all the way through](#). There were no notable differences in the percentage of respondents who reported that they always cook food until steaming hot and cooked all the way through between Wave 1 and Wave 8. Across all waves, around 8 in 10 respondents reported that they always cook food until steaming hot and cooked all the way through (Figure 33) [\(footnote 6\)](#).

Figure 33. The percentage of respondents who always cook food until it is steaming hot and cooked all the way through.

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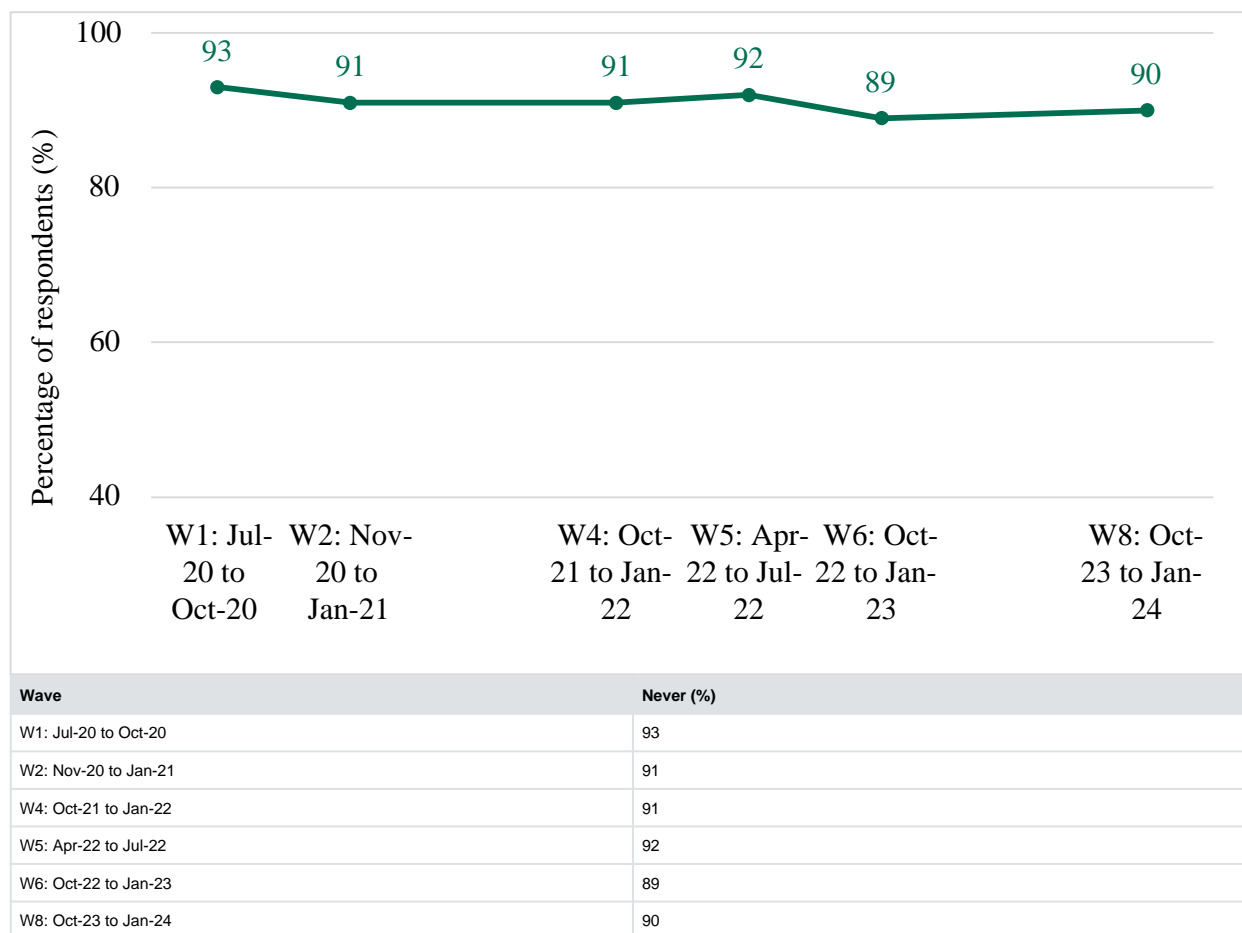
Food and You 2: Wave 1, 2, 4-6 and 8

There was a slight decline in the percentage of respondents who reported ‘never’ eating chicken or turkey when it is pink or has pink juices between Wave 1 (July 2020 to October 2020) (93%) and Wave 8 (October 2023 to January 2024) (90%). However, across all waves around 9 in 10 respondents reported that they would never eat chicken or turkey when it is pink or has pink juices (Figure 34) [\(footnote 7\)](#).

Figure 34. The percentage of respondents who never eat chicken or turkey when it is pink or has pink juices.

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Food and You 2: Wave 1, 2, 4-6 and 8

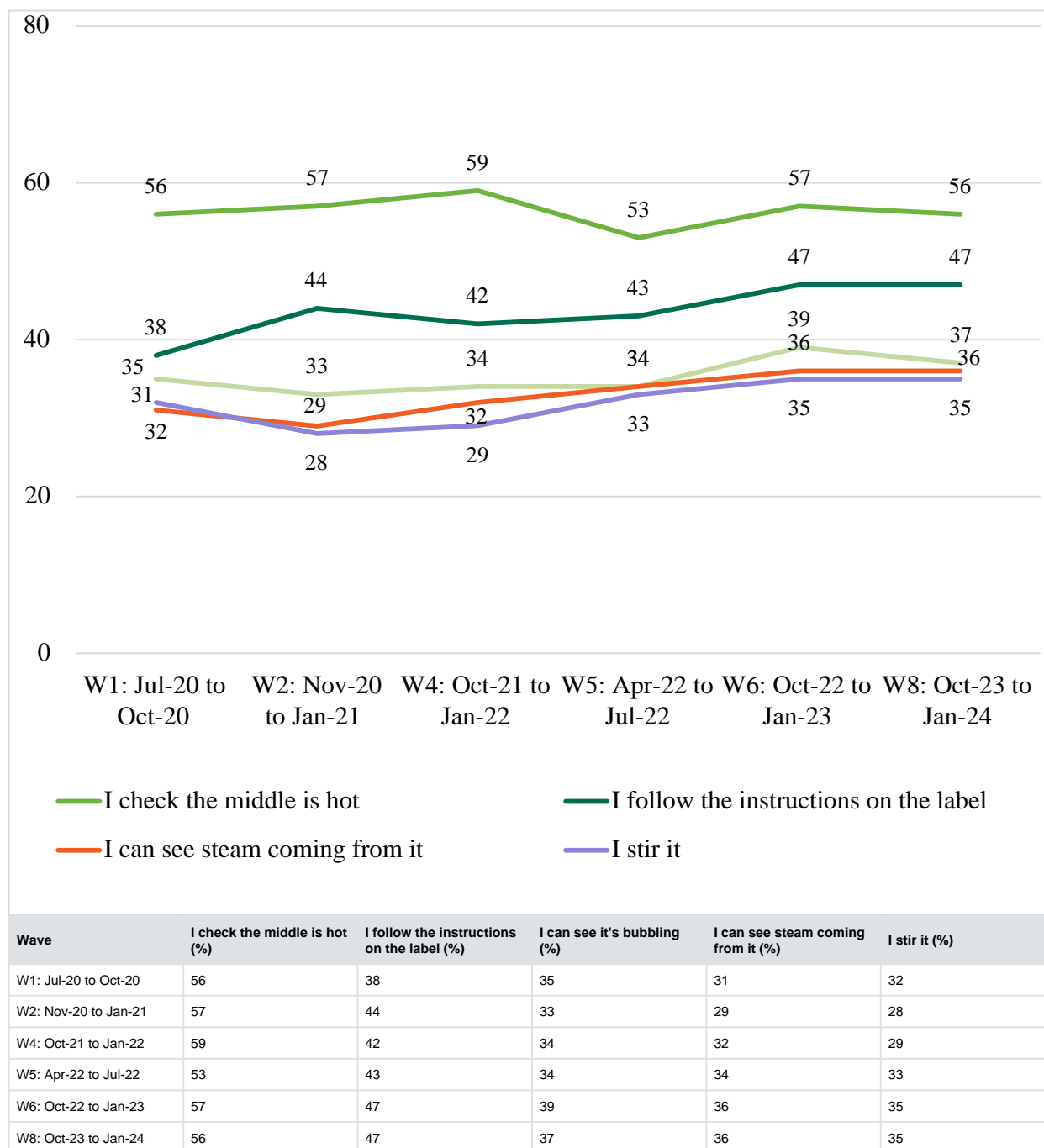
Reheating

Respondents were asked how they know food is ready to eat when reheating it. Across all waves, the top 5 methods for checking food have remained consistent with the most respondents reporting that they 'check that the middle is hot' in all waves (53%-59%). Between Wave 1 and Wave 8, there was an increase in percentage of respondents who reported looking for steam coming from food (from 31% to 36%) and followed instructions on the label (from 38% to 47%) ([footnote 8](#)) (Figure 35).

Figure 35. Most common (top 5) methods used to check if food is ready to eat when reheating it.

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Food and You 2: Wave 1, 2, 4-6 and 8

The FSA recommends that [food is only reheated once](#). There were no notable differences in the number of times respondents would reheat food between Wave 1 and Wave 8. Across all waves, around 8 in 10 respondents reported that they would reheat food only once (Figure 36) [\(footnote 9\)](#).

Figure 36. How many times respondents would consider reheating food.

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Food and You 2: Wave 2, 4, 5, 6, 8

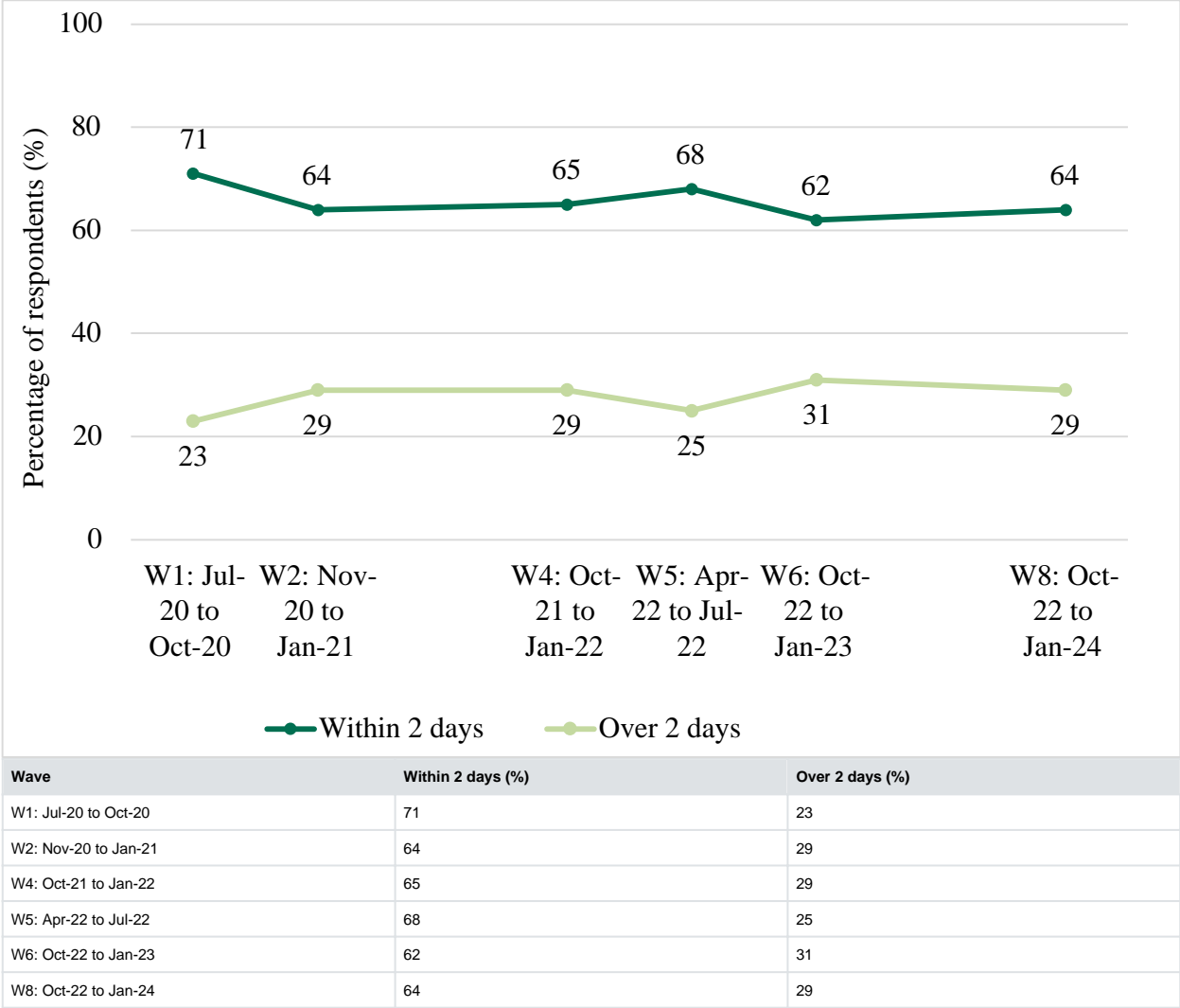
Leftovers

Between Wave 1 (July 2020 to October 2020) and Wave 8 (October 2023 to January 2024) there was a slight decrease in the percentage of respondents who reported that they would eat leftovers within 2 days (from 71% in Wave 1 to 64% in Wave 8), and a slight increase in the percentage of respondents who reported that they would eat leftovers after 2 days or more (from 23% in Wave 1 to 29% in Wave 8) (Figure 37) ** [\(footnote 10\)](#).

Figure 37. The latest respondents would consume any leftovers stored in the fridge.

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Food and You 2: Wave 1, 2, 4-6, 8

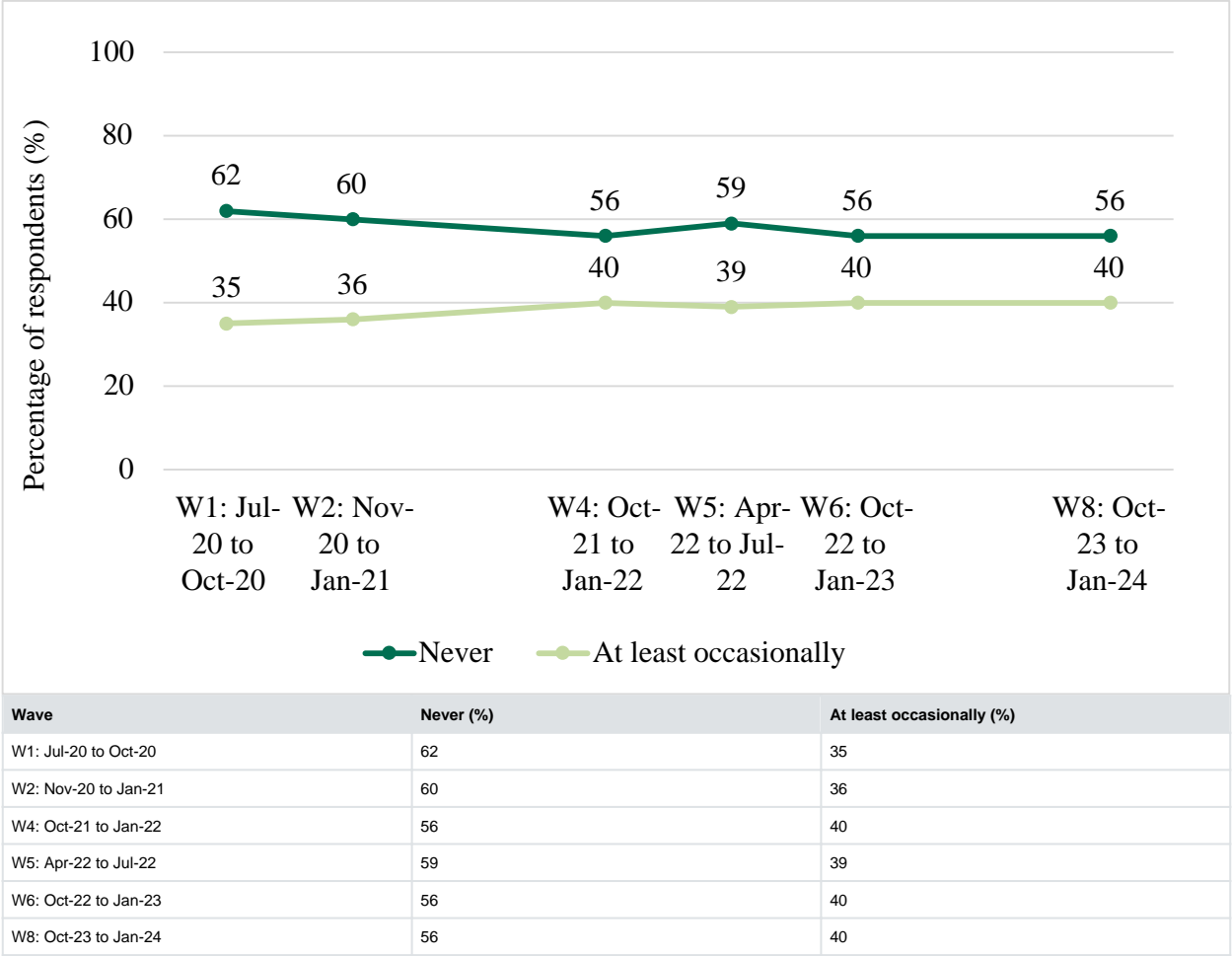
Avoiding cross-contamination

The FSA provides guidelines on [how to avoid cross-contamination](#). The FSA recommends that people do not wash raw meat, fish or poultry. Washing raw meat can spread harmful bacteria onto hands, work surfaces, ready-to-eat foods and cooking equipment. Between Wave 1 (July 2020 to October 2020) and Wave 8 (October 2023 to January 2024), there were a slight increase in the percentage of respondents who reported that they wash raw chicken at least occasionally (from 35% in Wave 1 to 40% in Wave 8), whilst those who report never doing so have decreased over time (from 62% in Wave 1 to 56% in Wave 8)** (Figure 38) [\(footnote 11\)](#).

Figure 38. The percentage of respondents who never and at least occasionally wash raw chicken.

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Food and You 2: Wave 1, 2, 4-6, 8

Use-by dates

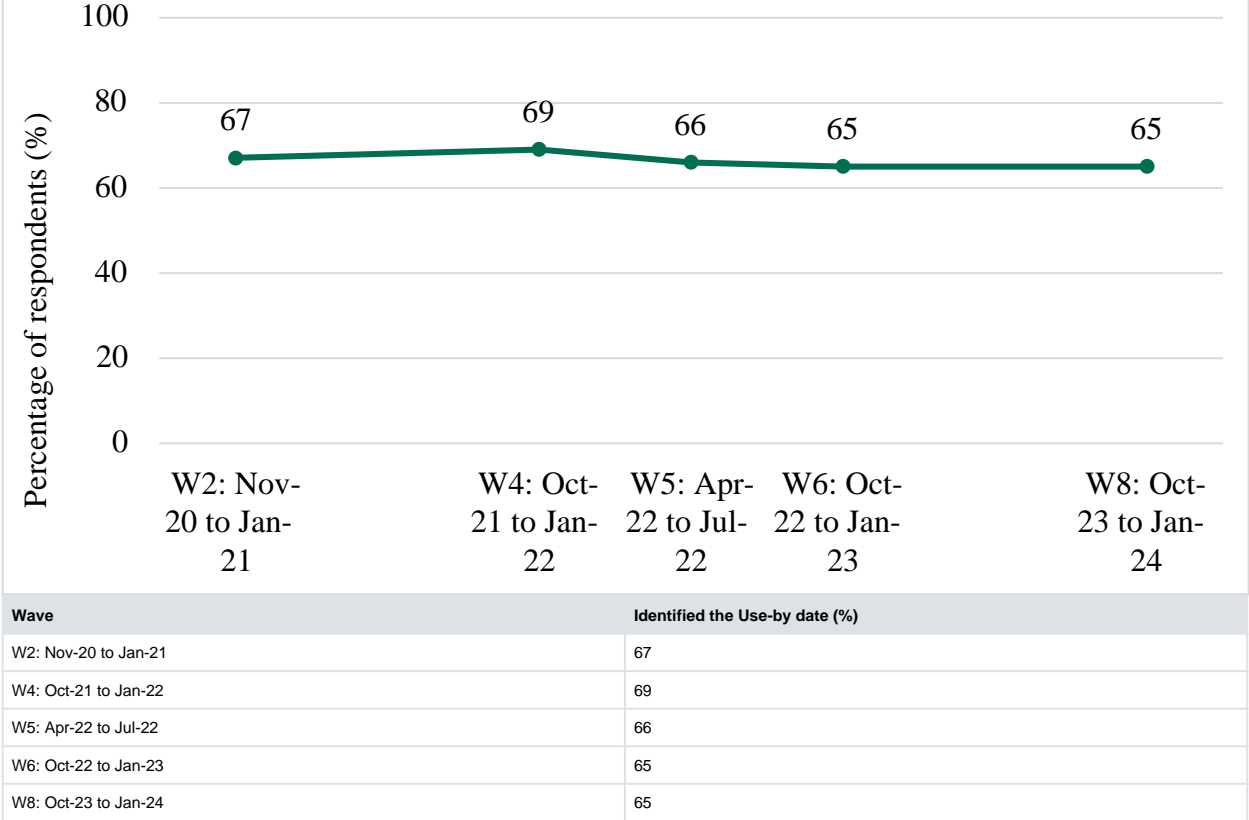
Respondents were asked about their understanding of the different types of [date labels](#) and instructions on food packaging, as storing food for too long or at the wrong temperature can cause food poisoning, use-by dates related to food safety and best before (BBE) dates relate to food quality.

Across all waves, over 6 in 10 respondents identified the use-by date as the information which shows that food is no longer safe to eat. Slightly more identified this correctly in Wave 4 (69%), compared to other waves** (65-67%) (Figure 39) [\(footnote 12\)](#).

Figure 39. The percentage of respondents who identified the use-by date as the information which shows when food is no longer safe to eat.

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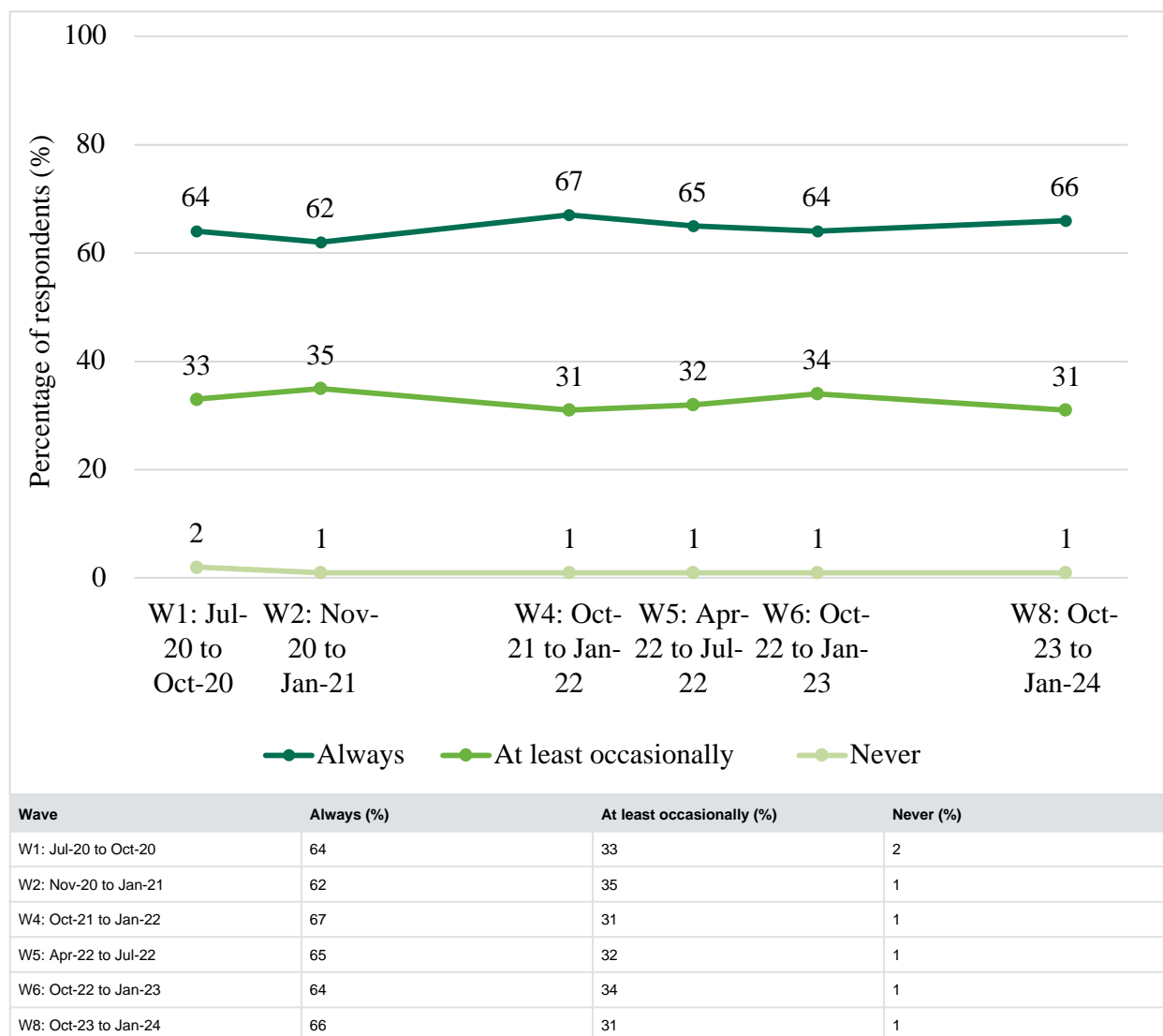
Food and You 2: Wave 2, 4-6, 8

There were no notable differences in in the percentage of respondents who reported checking use-by dates before cooking or preparing food between Wave 1 and Wave 8. Across all waves, over 6 in 10 respondents reported that they always check use-by dates before they cook or prepare food (Figure 40) [\(footnote 13\)](#).

Figure 40. How often respondents check use-by dates when they are about to cook or prepare food.

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Food and You 2: Wave 1, 2, 4-6, 8

1. Question: When you are at home, how often, if at all, do you ... a) wash your hands before starting to prepare or cook food? b) wash your hands immediately after handling raw meat, poultry or fish? Responses: always; most of the time; about half the time; occasionally; never; don't know; a) I don't cook, b) I don't cook meat, poultry or fish, I don't cook. Total base across waves 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 = 33,149 (range between 4,431 in Wave 8 and 8,922 in Wave 1), all online respondents and all those who completed the relevant postal questionnaire, who ever do some food preparation or cooking for their household. Please note: this question was not included in Wave 3 or 7.
2. Question: When you are at home, how often, if at all, do you wash your hands before eating? Responses: always; most of the time; about half the time; occasionally; never. Total base across waves 1, 5, 6 and 8 = 25,739, (range between 4,757 in Wave 8 and 9,319 in Wave 1), all online respondents and all those who completed the relevant postal questionnaire. Please note: this question was not included in Wave 2, 3, 4, 7.

3. Question: When eating outside of the home, how often, if at all, do you wash your hands, or use hand sanitising gel or wipes before eating? Responses: always, most of the time, About half the time, Occasionally, Never, Don't know. Total base across waves 4, 5, 6 and 8 = 21,384 (range between 4,755 in Wave 4 and 6,770 in Wave 5), all online respondents and those who completed the relevant postal questionnaire who ever do some food preparation or cooking for their household. Please note: this question was not included in Waves 1, 2, 3 or 7.

4. Question: What do you think the temperature inside your fridge should be? Responses: less than 0 degrees C (less than 32 degrees F), between 0 and 5 degrees C (32 to 41 degrees F), more than 5 but less than 8 degrees C (42 to 46 degrees F), 8 to 10 degrees C (47 to 50 degrees F), more than 10 degrees C (over 50 degrees F), other, I don't have a fridge, don't know. Total base across waves 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 = 35,271, all online respondents and those answering the relevant postal questionnaire, excluding those who don't have a fridge. Please note: this question was not included in Wave 3 or 7.

5. Question: Do you, or anyone else in your household, ever check your fridge temperature? Responses: yes, no, I don't need to - it has an alarm if it is too hot or cold, don't know. Total base across waves 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8 = 35,261 (range between 4,740 in Wave 8 and 9,305 in Wave 1), all online respondents, and all those who completed the relevant postal questionnaire, excluding those who don't have a fridge. Please note: this question was not included in Waves 3 or 7.

6. Question: How often, if at all, do you cook food until it is steaming hot and cooked all the way through? Responses: always, most of the time, about half of the time, occasionally, I don't cook food, never, don't know. Total base across waves 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 = 33,149 (range between 4,431 in Wave 8 and 8,922 in Wave 1), online respondents and all those who completed the relevant postal questionnaire, who ever do some food preparation or cooking for their household. Please note: this question was not included in Waves 3 or 7.

7. Question: How often, if at all, do you eat chicken or turkey when the meat is pink or has pink or red juices? Responses: always, most of the time, about half of the time, occasionally, never, don't know. Base = 32,686, (range between 4,381 in Wave 4 and 8,672 in Wave 1) all online respondents, and those answering the relevant postal questionnaire, who are not vegan, pescatarian or vegetarian, and who do eat chicken/turkey. Please note: this question was not included in Waves 3 or 7.

8. Question: When reheating food, how do you know when it is ready to eat? (Select all that apply). Responses: I check the middle is hot, I follow the instructions on the label, I can see its bubbling, I use a timer to ensure it has been cooked for a certain amount of time, I check it's an even temperature throughout, I can see steam coming from it, I taste it, I stir it, I put my hand over it/touch it, I use a thermometer/probe, None of the above, I don't check. Total base across waves 1, 2, 4-6 7 and 8 = 31,388, (range between 4,208 in Wave 4 and 8,375 in Wave 1) all online respondents and all those who completed the relevant postal questionnaire, who ever do some food preparation or cooking for their household, excluding 'I don't reheat food' and 'not stated'. Please note: this question was not included in Waves 3 or 7.

9. Question: How many times would you consider reheating food after it was cooked for the first time? Responses: not at all, once, twice, more than twice, don't know, I don't reheat

food. Total base across all waves = 23,130, (range between 4,402 in Wave 2 and 5,918 in Wave 5) all online respondents and all those who completed the relevant postal questionnaire, who reheat food using one of the methods in the previous question. Please note: this question is not comparable in Wave 1, and was not included in Wave 3 or 7.

10. Question: When is the latest you would consume any leftovers stored in the fridge? Responses: the same day, within 1-2 days, within 3-5 days, more than 5 days later, it varies too much, don't know. Total base across waves 1, 2, 4-6 and 8 = 35,339 (range between 4,757 in Wave 8 and 9, 319 in Wave 1), all online respondents, and those answering the relevant postal questionnaire. Please note: this question was not included in Wave 3 or 7.
11. Question: How often, if at all, do you wash raw chicken? Responses: always, most of the time, about half of the time, occasionally, never, don't know. Total base across waves 1, 2, 4-6 and 8 = 33,058 (range between 4,407 in wave 8 and 8,922 in wave 1), all online respondents and all those who completed the relevant postal questionnaire, who ever do some food preparation or cooking for their household. Please note: this question was not included in Wave 3 or 7.
12. Question: Which of these shows when food is no longer safe to eat? Responses: use-by date, best before date, sell by date, display until date, all of these, it depends, none of these, don't know. Total base across waves 2, 4-6, 8 = 26,020 (range between 4,757 in Wave 8 and 6,770 in Wave 5), all online respondents, and those answering the relevant postal questionnaire. Please note: this question was not included in Wave 1, 3 or 7.
13. Question: How often, if at all, do you check use-by dates when you are about to cook or prepare food? Responses: always, most of the time, about half of the time, occasionally, never, it varies too much to say, I don't cook/prepare food, don't know. Total base across Waves 1, 2, 4-6, 8 = 33,149 (range between 4,431 in Wave 1 and 8,922 in Wave 1), all online respondents and all those who completed the relevant postal questionnaire, who ever do some food preparation or cooking for their household. Please note: this question was not included in Wave 3 or 7.