

Use of questionnaires for FWD outbreaks

Different types of questionnaires should be used at different stages in an outbreak investigation. This is illustrated in the figure below.

Trawling questionnaires

A trawling questionnaire is used to generate hypotheses about possible sources of infection. This type of questionnaire should be used to interview the first cases that are identified as belonging to a potential outbreak that need public health attention. Cases are asked about a wide range of exposures in order to identify possible sources. Following the use of a trawling questionnaire, it may be decided to initiate an analytical epidemiological study if some clear hypotheses emerges.

Analytical questionnaires

Analytical studies, such as cohort studies (most often used for outbreaks where the population is known) and case-control studies (most often used to sample large exposed populations), are used to test hypotheses and attempt to overcome bias. An analytical study questionnaire is therefore used once there is a clear hypothesis to test in order to quantify risk associated with a suspected source. As multiple hypotheses may have been developed with the trawling questionnaire, the analytical questionnaire is typically shorter and focused on the areas of most interest.

Questionnaires provided as part of this tool

As part of this Toolbox, a number of investigators from different European countries have kindly provided questionnaires for trawling interviews for different pathogens or for analytical studies done for specific outbreaks. A number of these questionnaires are included in the repository (Tool 9). There is obviously a very large variety in these questionnaires that not only reflect the many different pathogens and different approaches, but also the different foods that are available in each country – and of course they are in different languages also.

Therefore, it is not possible a priori to make questionnaires that can be used directly for future international investigations. For international outbreaks, questionnaires will always have to be modified according to the situation reflected in the outbreak that is currently being investigated. Here, we have therefore not included many hundred potentially usable templates, but only provided basic templates within logical categories of questions. These can be used as examples or as a framework for more specific questionnaires. In EpiData, questionnaires, both for trawling and analytical purposes, may be created relatively quickly by creating text templates that can then be transformed into EpiData files. Detailed instructions explaining how to do this are therefore also part of this tool.

At the national or local level, however, it may be advisable to make standard trawling questionnaires in EpiData, suitable for the most common situations. We hope this tool may inspire to do so.

