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Tulare County
 Agriculture and Natural Resources



Prepared by: _____

Egg Safety

In the past two weeks, I've seen two potential food safety problems associated with eggs. One, a potluck with deviled eggs left on the table for several hours; the second, eggs prepared for an Easter Egg hunt also left at room temperature for several hours. Following these observations, I thought an update on egg safety would be of interest especially as we move into the warmer months of the year.

Why is egg safety a concern?

President Clinton announced a new safety plan last December that he hopes will cut in half the number of eggs contaminated with Salmonella by 2005, and eliminate Salmonella contamination in eggs entirely by 2010. The President's Council on Food Safety identified eggs as a food that poses a risk to children, the elderly, and people with compromised immune systems.

Americans consume an average of 234 eggs per person per year. While it is estimated that only one in 20,000 eggs is contaminated with Salmonella this involves over 3.3 million eggs a year. "Every year, Salmonella bacteria causes 300,000 cases of illness," Clinton said in his weekly radio release. "And when infected eggs still make it from the farm to the table, we know we have more work to do."

What part of the egg carries the bacteria?

Researchers say the Salmonella bacteria are usually in the yolk. But they can't rule out its presence in egg whites. So everyone is advised against eating raw or undercooked eggs, or products containing them.

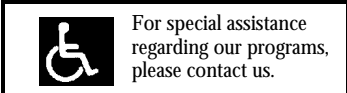
Who should be extra-careful?

People with health problems, the very young, the elderly and pregnant women (and the unborn child) are particularly vulnerable to Salmonella enteritidis infections. Health problems could be a chronic illness or any condition which weakens the immune system.

What can you do at home?

Proper refrigeration, cooking and handling should solve most "egg" problems. You can continue

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to enjoy eggs and egg-rich foods if you follow these safe handling guidelines.

To be egg-safe:

1. Avoid eating raw eggs or foods that contain them.

This includes milkshakes or other drinks made with raw eggs, Caesar salad, Hollandaise sauce, and any other foods like homemade mayonnaise, ice cream or egg nog made from recipes in which the raw egg is not cooked.

2. At the store—Choose Grade A or AA eggs with clean, uncracked shells.

Make sure they have been refrigerated in the store. Any bacteria present in an egg can grow quickly at room temperature.

3. Refrigerating eggs—Take eggs straight home to the refrigerator.

A home refrigerator should be running at 40° F. Store eggs in the coldest part of the refrigerator, not in the door. Don't wash eggs. You'll remove a protective coating applied at the packing plant.

4. How long will eggs keep in the refrigerator?

Use raw shell eggs within 3 to 5 weeks. Hard-cooked eggs will keep for 1 week. Use leftover yolks and whites within 4 days. Eggs break on the way home? Break them into a clean container, cover tightly and keep refrigerated for use within 2 days.

5. Handling eggs

Wash hands, utensils, equipment and work areas with hot, soapy water before and after contact with eggs and egg-rich foods. Avoid keeping eggs out of the refrigerator over 2 hours. Serve cooked eggs and egg-rich foods immediately after cooking, or refrigerate at once for later use. Use within 3-4 days.

6. Safer egg recipes

Update recipes for Caesar salad, Hollandaise sauce, homemade mayonnaise, salad dressing and other uncooked egg-based sauces by using commercial pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes. Egg mixtures are safe if they reach 160° F., so you can make eggnog, ice cream or soft custards from fresh eggs if you start with a cooked base that has reached this temperature. Use a thermometer to test.

7. Easter eggs

Cooking removes the eggshell's natural protective coating, so hard-cooked eggs are more susceptible to bacteria than fresh shell eggs. Refrigerate Easter eggs immediately after cooking and dyeing. Don't leave them out of refrigeration longer than 2 hours during the hunt either. After each of your egg-finders has found their eggs, refrigerate the eggs again. They should keep about a week.

Source: Egg Handling Handbook from USDA-FSIS, Room 1165-South, Washington, D.C. 20205 Telephone:202-690-0351

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