



University of California
Cooperative Extension
Tulare County

Agriculture and Natural Resources



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PLAYING IT SAFE WITH EGGS

To avoid the possibility of foodborne illness, fresh eggs must be handled carefully. Even eggs with clean, uncracked shells may occasionally contain bacteria called Salmonella that can cause an intestinal infection. For this reason, beginning September 2001, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will require all cartons of shell eggs that have not been treated to destroy Salmonella to carry the following safe handling statement:

Safe Handling Instructions: To prevent illness from bacteria: keep eggs refrigerated, cook eggs until yolks are firm, and cook foods containing eggs thoroughly.

Following these instructions is important for everyone but especially for those most vulnerable to foodborne disease; children, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems.

Eggs that have been treated to destroy Salmonella by in-shell pasteurization, for example, are not required to carry safe handling instructions.

Buy Right

- Buy eggs only if sold from a refrigerator or refrigerated case.
- Open the carton and make sure that the eggs are clean and the shells are not cracked.
- Refrigerate promptly.
- Store eggs in their original carton and use them within 3 weeks for best quality.
- Keep everything clean.

Before preparing any food, remember that cleanliness is key! Wash hands, utensils, equipment, and work surfaces with hot, soapy water before and after food preparation.

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Cook Thoroughly

Thorough cooking is perhaps the most important step in making sure eggs are safe. Scrambled eggs should not be runny. Casseroles and other dishes containing eggs should be cooked to 160°F (72°C). For recipes that call for eggs that are raw or undercooked when the dish is served—Caesar salad dressing and homemade ice cream are two examples—use either shell eggs that have been treated to destroy Salmonella, by pasteurization or another approved method, or pasteurized egg products.

Serve Safely

- Serve cooked eggs and egg-containing foods immediately after cooking.
- Hot egg dishes should be kept hot, and cold egg dishes kept cold.
- Eggs and egg dishes, such as quiches or soufflés, may be refrigerated for serving later but should be thoroughly reheated to 165°F (74°C) before serving.

Chill Properly

- Cooked eggs, including hard-boiled eggs, and egg-containing foods should not sit out for more than 2 hours. Within 2 hours either reheat or refrigerate.
- Use hard-cooked eggs (in the shell or peeled) within 1 week after cooking.
- Use frozen eggs within one year. Eggs should not be frozen in their shells. To freeze whole eggs, beat yolks and whites together. Egg whites can also be frozen by themselves.
- Refrigerate leftover cooked egg dishes and use within 3-4 days. When refrigerating a large amount of a hot egg-containing leftover, divide it into several shallow containers so it will cool quickly.

On the Road

- Cooked eggs for a picnic should be packed in an insulated cooler with enough ice or frozen gel packs to keep them cold. Carry the cooler in the air-conditioned part of the car.
 - If taking cooked eggs to work or school, pack them with a small frozen gel pack or a frozen juice box.
- FDA also requires that, by June 2001, untreated shell eggs sold at stores, roadside stands, etc., must be stored and displayed under refrigeration at 45° F (7° C).

Source: Food Safety Fact for Consumers, Playing it Safe With Eggs, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, U.S. Food and Drug Administration. February 2001

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