



FOODFACTS

From the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Playing it Safe With Eggs *What You Need to Know*

Fresh eggs must be handled carefully to avoid the possibility of foodborne illness, often called “food poisoning.” Even eggs with clean, uncracked shells may occasionally contain bacteria called *Salmonella* that can cause an intestinal infection.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates that 142,000 illnesses each year are caused by consuming eggs contaminated with *Salmonella*. FDA has put regulations in place to help prevent contamination of eggs on the farm and during shipping and storage.

But consumers play a key role in preventing illness associated with eggs. In fact, the most effective way to prevent egg-related illness is by knowing how to buy, store, handle and cook eggs — or foods that contain them — safely. Follow these safe handling tips to help protect yourself and your family.



FDA requires 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

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

What is *Salmonella*?

Salmonella, the name of a group of bacteria, is the most common cause of food poisoning in the United States. *Salmonella* germs have been known to cause illness for over 100 years. They were discovered by an American scientist named Salmon, for whom they are named.

Most people infected with *Salmonella* develop diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps, and vomiting 12 to 72 hours after infection. Symptoms usually last 4 to 7 days and most people get better without treatment. However, in some people, the diarrhea may be so severe that they need to be hospitalized. In these patients, the *Salmonella* infection may spread from the intestines to the blood stream, and then to other body sites and can cause death unless the person is treated quickly with antibiotics. Certain people are at greater risk for severe illness and include pregnant women, young children, older adults and people with weakened immune systems.

Buy Right

You can help keep eggs safe by making wise buying decisions at the grocery store.

- 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 they come in contact with eggs and egg-containing foods.



Cook Thoroughly

Thorough cooking is perhaps the most important step in making sure eggs are safe.

- Cook eggs until both the yolk and the white are firm. Scrambled eggs should not be runny.
- Casseroles and other dishes containing eggs should be cooked to 160°F (72°C). Use a food thermometer to be sure.
- 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. Treated shell eggs are available from a growing number of retailers and are clearly labeled, while pasteurized egg products are widely available.



Serve Safely

Bacteria can multiply in temperatures from 40°F (5°C) to 140°F (60°C), so it's very important to serve foods safely.

- Serve cooked eggs and egg-containing foods immediately after cooking.
- For buffet-style serving, 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.
- 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.

Store Properly

- Use hard-cooked eggs (in the shell or peeled) within 1 week after cooking.
- Use frozen eggs within 1 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 to 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.
- Don't put the cooler in the trunk — carry it in the air-conditioned passenger compartment of the car.
- If taking cooked eggs to work or school, pack them with a small frozen gel pack or a frozen juice box.

