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News Release

EGG HANDLING & STORAGE

With all the recent news about egg recalls, I have received many calls pertaining to safe egg handling and storage. You may have some of the same questions. This article covers many of those concerns I am hearing that you may have also.

How should eggs be refrigerated?

Refrigerate raw shell eggs in their cartons on the middle or lower inside shelf, not in the door, and away from any meat that might drip juices. Also, keep away from any raw produce that might contact eggshells. Cover or wrap well any egg mixtures or leftover cooked egg dishes. For all perishable foods, including eggs and dishes containing eggs, allow no more than 2 hours at room temperature for preparation and serving, 30 minutes to 1 hour when it's 85°F or hotter without refrigeration.

How long are eggs that have been refrigerated safe to eat?

Raw eggs maintain their freshness for 4-5 weeks after purchase if kept refrigerated continuously.

How long are hard cooked eggs that have been refrigerated safe to eat?

A hard cooked egg, if kept in its shell, can be safely refrigerated for up to one week.

I just realized I left the egg carton on the kitchen counter overnight. Are the eggs safe to use?

Temperature fluctuation is critical to safety. After eggs are refrigerated, it is important that they stay that way. A cold egg left out at room temperature can sweat, facilitating the growth of bacteria. Refrigerated eggs should not be left out more than 2 hours.

What should you consider when purchasing eggs?

Always buy eggs from a refrigerated case. Choose eggs with clean, uncracked shells. Don't buy out of date eggs. The USDA grade shield on the carton means that the eggs were graded for quality and checked for weight under the supervision of a trained USDA grader. State agencies monitor compliance for egg packers who do not use the USDA grading service.

What does the date on the egg carton mean?

Egg cartons with the USDA grademark must display a “Julian date,” the date the eggs were packed. Although not required, they may also carry an expiration date beyond which the eggs should not be sold, but are still safe to eat. On cartons with the USDA grademark, this date cannot exceed 30 days after the eggs were packed in the carton. Depending on the retailer, the expiration date may be less than 30 days. Eggs packed in cartons without the USDA grademark are governed by the laws of their states.

COOKING WITH EGGS

What is an adequate temperature to cook an egg?

Eggs you serve immediately at home need to be cooked to 145 degrees and if serving in a serving line in a commercial kitchen they must reach 155 degrees. Please do not use raw eggs unless they are pasteurized in homemade ice cream because people can become infected with salmonella from raw eggs. Mix the eggs with a little milk and sugar and heat quickly to 160 degrees to a custard state and then cool down and mix with your other ingredients when making homemade ice cream if you like that rich taste eggs give it.

How does Salmonella infect eggs?

Salmonella bacteria are found in the intestinal tracts of animals, birds, reptiles, insects and humans. Salmonella may be found on the outside of the egg shell before the egg is washed or it may be found inside the egg if the hen was infected. It is estimated that one egg in 20,000 eggs may contain Salmonella. Eggs contain natural antimicrobial substances in the egg white, and all eggs are washed and sanitized before they are packed. Egg recipes properly prepared in individual servings and promptly eaten are rarely a problem. ***Inadequate refrigeration, improper handling and insufficient cooking are all factors that have contributed to disease outbreaks. Salmonella is destroyed by heat. Eggs that have been handled and cooked properly should not cause human illness.***

What will happen if I eat an egg containing Salmonella?

If an egg containing Salmonella has been kept refrigerated and someone who uses good hygiene practices serves it to you immediately after proper cooking, you'll simply have a nutritious meal. If the egg has been improperly handled, though, you might experience the foodborne illness called salmonellosis. You could have symptoms of abdominal cramps, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, chills, fever and/or headache within 6 to 72 hours after eating. The symptoms usually last only a day or two in healthy people but can lead to serious complications for the very young, pregnant women, the elderly, the ill and those with immune system disorders. Anyone who has had salmonellosis may pass along the bacteria for several weeks after recovering, but salmonellosis is seldom fatal.

What usually causes salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis outbreaks are most often associated with animal foods, including chicken, eggs, pork and cheese, but have also been reported related to cantaloupe, tomatoes, alfalfa sprouts, orange juice and cereal among other foods. Human carriers play a big role in transmitting some

types of salmonellosis. Salmonella bacteria can easily spread from one food to another and from foodhandler to food if improper handwashing is practiced.

The majority of reported salmonellosis outbreaks involving eggs or egg-containing foods have occurred in food service kitchens and were the result of inadequate refrigeration, improper handling and insufficient cooking. If not properly handled, Salmonella bacteria can double every 20 minutes and a single bacterium can multiply into more than a million in six hours. Properly prepared egg recipes served in individual portions and promptly eaten are rarely a problem. You can ensure that your eggs will maintain their high quality and safety by using good hygiene, cooking, refrigeration and handling practices.

Are eggs the only source of Salmonella bacteria?

No. Salmonella bacteria are widely found in nature and easily spread. The bacteria can be found in the intestinal tracts of animals, birds, reptiles, insects and people. While the egg itself may not be contaminated when you buy it, it can become contaminated from various sources, such as hands, pets, other foods and kitchen equipment, too.

If you have other questions about egg or food safety, please call Regional Extension Agent, Angela Treadaway, at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205 338-9416 or email treadas@aces.edu).