Egg safety for food businesses

A number of food-borne illness outbreaks have been associated with foods that have been prepared using eggs or egg products. In most egg-related outbreaks in commercial premises, raw eggs were used as an ingredient in foods that were not cooked further. Examples of such foods include mayonnaise, aioli, custard, cheesecake, mousse and eggnog.

Eggs pose a food safety risk if cracked or dirty eggs are used in the preparation of food. Dirty eggs may have harmful bacteria on the shell and their porous shell can allow bacteria to move inside the egg. Cross contamination may also occur when handling dirty eggs and ready-to-eat food.

Legal obligations of food businesses

In addition to the legal obligations that apply to all food under the Food Act 2006 and the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code), Standard 2.2.2 of the Code imposes the following additional legal requirements for eggs.

Cracked and dirty eggs

Standard 2.2.2 prohibits the sale or supply of cracked (including broken) eggs, dirty eggs and unprocessed egg pulp, by retail sale or for catering purposes.

Traceability

Standard 2.2.2 requires eggs for retail sale or for catering purposes to be individually marked with the producer’s or processor’s unique identification. This is for traceability purposes. Food businesses should check that eggs are stamped prior to selling them.

Egg safety

Storage of raw eggs

When storing eggs:
- whole eggs should be stored under refrigeration, as this minimises the risk of harmful bacteria growing and extends the shelf life
- cartons that contain spilt raw egg from cracked eggs should be discarded and not reused for repacking eggs to avoid cross contamination
- eggs should be used before their ‘best before’ date
- a clean separate container should be used for each batch of an egg product, i.e. sauces, mayonnaise or egg butter should not be ‘topped up’
- liquid egg products should not be stored - once eggs have been broken, they should be used immediately, however, raw egg whites and yolks can be kept under refrigeration for up to 4 days.

Handling of raw eggs

The following precautions should be taken when handling eggs:
- avoiding any unnecessary handling of eggs
- hands should be washed and dried before and after handling eggs
- contact between the shell and the contents of the egg should be minimised when breaking eggs
ensure utensils, equipment and other food contact surfaces such as benches are appropriately cleaned and sanitised after handling eggs and egg products.

eggs should not be washed - this makes them more susceptible to contamination.

Separating eggs
A significant handling step in ensuring safe products using eggs is at the separation process. To ensure safe food when separating eggs:
- always wash hands before and after handling raw eggs
- do not separate raw eggs using the hands as there is no opportunity for appropriate handwashing between handling the shell to separating the egg
- minimise contact between the shell and the contents of the egg when cracking and separating eggs
- preferably, a sanitised egg separator should be used or use gloves, with one gloved hand to crack the egg and the other to separate the egg white from the yolk

Cooking eggs
Harmful bacteria are killed by cooking, but illness can occur if eggs are added to a food that will not be cooked or if the eggs are only partially cooked.

Eggs should be cooked until the yolk and white are firm. Scrambled and fried eggs should be cooked in small batches until they are firm (not runny) throughout. Boiled eggs, depending on their initial size and temperature, may require a minimum boiling period of 7-9 minutes to ensure that the yolk becomes firm.

When reheating cooked food containing eggs, ensure that the food is reheated thoroughly to piping hot.

2.6 Cross contamination
While it is important to ensure good food safety practices as described above are satisfied, food businesses also need to ensure there is no cross contamination between eggs or egg products and other food items. For example:
- always wash hands when changing tasks especially after handling eggs
- avoiding any unnecessary contact with eggs
- when separating eggs, avoid raw egg product splashing onto ready-to-eat food
- use separate utensils or thoroughly wash and sanitise utensils between handling eggs or egg products and ready-to-eat foods
- a clean separate container should be used for each batch of an egg product, i.e. sauces, mayonnaise or egg butter should not be ‘topped up’
- ensure utensils, equipment and benches are appropriately cleaned and sanitised after preparing eggs and egg products

For further information
The Queensland Department of Health has a variety of fact sheets with detailed information on food safety. These can be accessed at www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety.

If you have any further questions relating to:
- the sale or supply of cracked or dirty eggs—contact the Public Health Unit for the area where your food business is located. Contact details for Public Health Units can be found at www.health.qld.gov.au/cho.
- food handling and hygiene—contact the local government for the area where your food business is located. Contact details can be found in the White Pages or at www.dlgp.qld.gov.au/local-government-directory.
- egg stamping for traceability purposes—contact Safe Food Production Queensland on phone (07) 3253 9800 or email info@safefood.qld.gov.au.

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