Food safety—Salmonella
Egg safety for the consumer

Recent foodborne illness outbreaks have been associated with foods that have been prepared using eggs and egg products that were either not cooked or not cooked long enough. Examples of foods that contain raw egg include mayonnaise, aioli, custard, cheesecake, eggnog, deep fried ice-cream and mousse.

Never use cracked or dirty eggs in the preparation of food. Dirty eggs may have harmful Salmonella bacteria on the shell. Cracked eggs allow harmful Salmonella bacteria to enter and grow inside the egg. However even eggs with clean, uncracked shells pose a risk if handled incorrectly.

Cross contamination can also occur when handling eggs and ready-to-eat food.

Salmonella
Salmonella stands out as the most commonly reported microbiological agent responsible for foodborne illness where eggs have been implicated as the cause. Salmonella infection causes gastroenteritis (commonly known as “gastro”) and is associated with eggs and egg products.

Anyone can be affected by Salmonella, but certain people are at greater risk for severe illness and include pregnant women, young children, older adults and people with weakened immune systems.

Symptoms of Salmonella food poisoning include headache, fever, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting which can last days or weeks.

Egg safety
Don’t wash eggs
Egg shells become more porous when wet, making it easier for any bacteria from dirt or feathers on the shell to get inside the egg.

Storage of eggs
When storing eggs:
• egg and egg products should be stored under refrigeration, as this minimises the risk of harmful Salmonella bacteria growing
• store eggs in their original carton in the fridge which is labelled with the ‘best before’ date
• for a picnic/daytrip foods that contain raw egg should be packed in an insulated cooler with enough ice, frozen blocks or a frozen juice box to keep them cold
• don’t put the insulated cooler in the car boot - carry it inside an air-conditioned vehicle.

Remember
It is important never to leave foods that contain raw egg out of the fridge for any longer than two hours in total, if not consumed within a day, throw it out.
Minimising the risks of food containing raw egg
- open the carton and check the eggs look clean and are not cracked before purchasing
- only make foods that contain raw egg products on the day you plan to eat it
- keep prepared eggs refrigerated until you are ready to use it
- never leave foods that contain raw egg out of the fridge for any longer than two hours
- if the food is not consumed within a day, throw it out
- to avoid cross contamination, cartons that contain cracked eggs should be discarded and not reused.

Handling of eggs
The following precautions should be taken when handling eggs:
- avoiding unnecessary handling of 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.

Ensure high hygiene standards

Separating eggs
To minimise cross contamination egg shells should not be used to separate the egg white from the egg yolk as Salmonella bacteria on the surface of the shell can be transferred to the contents of the egg.

Separating the eggs using bare hands is also a risk as hands may become contaminated with Salmonella bacteria resulting in cross contamination. Use a sanitised egg separator so that if Salmonella bacteria are present on the shell, it won’t contaminate the egg yolk or the egg white.

Remember
Hands should be washed and dried before and after handling eggs.

Cross contamination
You need to ensure there is no cross contamination between eggs or egg products and other food items. Use separate cutting boards for different types of foods to minimise cross contamination.
Cutting boards should be thoroughly washed with hot, soapy water each time they are used.

Queensland Health—Health Condition Directory: conditions.health.qld.gov.au

For health advice:
- contact your local doctor or nearest public health clinic
- call 13 HEALTH (13432584)

www.health.qld.gov.au