

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

DISCUSSION PAPER

**AN UPDATE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL RISK FROM SHELL EGGS
AND THEIR PRODCUTS**

1. In January 2015, the Food Standards Agency sought the Committee's advice on whether the risk to consumers (including vulnerable groups) from eating lightly cooked or raw shell eggs and their products has changed since the Committee last reviewed the subject of *Salmonella* in eggs in detail in 2001. A background paper was presented to the Committee at its January 2015 meeting, and the Committee was asked whether it would be appropriate to establish a subgroup to assess the current level of risk from shell eggs and their products (ACM/1166).
2. The ACMSF *Ad Hoc* Group on Eggs was formed in February 2015 and has met five times. The purpose of the group was to assess the current level of microbiological risk to consumers (including vulnerable groups) from raw or lightly cooked shell eggs and their products and to assess how the risk with respect to *Salmonella* has changed since the last ACMSF report on this subject in 2001.
3. The group is now in a position to present the first draft of its report to the Committee for consideration and comments (ACM/1023a); after which it is expected to undergo a twelve week period of public consultation. Comments received from respondents during this period will be considered prior to finalisation of the draft.

Key findings of the draft report

4. The Working Group is in agreement that there has been a major reduction in the microbiological risk from *Salmonella* in UK shell eggs from hens since the 2001 ACMSF report. The group's view is that this is especially the case for those eggs produced under the Lion Code scheme, which comprises a suite of measures including: vaccination, a cool chain from farm to retail outlets, enhanced testing for *Salmonella*, improved farm hygiene, rodent control, independent auditing, date stamping on the eggs and traceability. The group considers that the risk from non-UK eggs has also been reduced but not to the same extent.
5. Accordingly, the group suggests that the risk level for UK shell eggs from hens produced under the Lion code scheme, or produced under demonstrably-equivalent comprehensive schemes, can be regarded as

very low, whilst for other shell eggs the risk level should be considered as low.

6. The group is in agreement that the Agency's advice to consumers should be amended for UK shell eggs from hens produced under the Lion code scheme , or produced under demonstrably-equivalent comprehensive schemes to reflect that such eggs can be served raw or lightly cooked including to those in vulnerable groups. While the majority of the group considers that the advice relating to Lion code eggs or equivalently produced eggs can be extended to the catering sector; unanimous agreement was not established on this point. The main point of contention relates to the preparation of dishes using large pools of eggs sourced from Lion or an equivalent scheme in catering including hospitals and care homes. A particular concern was whether there will be any change in the level of risk if such pooled eggs are served raw or under-cooked to vulnerable groups. In part this reflects the susceptibility to cross-contamination of such pools, above and beyond the risk of *Salmonella* being present in or on the eggs being pooled.

7. The Group agreed that for those eggs in the 'low' risk group (UK produced non-Lion eggs, and non-UK eggs) that the existing advice should remain i.e. that the very young, the elderly, pregnant women, and those who are already unwell, should not consume these eggs raw or lightly cooked. Similarly, the group were also of the view that existing advice should remain for non-hen's eggs.

8. The group's view is that consumers and caterers must continue to be aware of the need to store eggs properly, to observe use by dates, and to avoid cross-contamination of eggs within the kitchen environment, particularly where the eggs' contents will be consumed raw or lightly cooked.

9. The Group considered that commercial egg products should continue to be pasteurised.

The Committee is invited to:

- Comment on the draft report
- Agree to a public consultation on the draft report once finalised.

**Secretariat
January 2016**