

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

DISCUSSION PAPER

AN UPDATE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL RISK OF SHELL EGGS AND THEIR PRODUCTS

1. The *Ad Hoc* Group on eggs met between February 2015 and January 2016 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.
2. The group agreed there has been a major reduction in the microbiological risk from *Salmonella* in UK hen shell eggs since the 2001 ACMSF report. This is especially the case for eggs produced under the Lion Code quality assurance scheme. The risk from non-UK eggs has also been reduced, but not to the same extent. Accordingly, the group suggested that the risk level for UK hen shell eggs produced under the Lion Code, or under demonstrably-equivalent comprehensive schemes, should be considered to be 'VERY LOW', whilst for other shell eggs the risk level should be considered 'LOW'. The only point where unanimous agreement was not reached by the group related to risk/uncertainty around eggs used in the catering and non-domestic environments (ACM 1203).
3. At the January 2016 ACMSF meeting, the *Ad Hoc* Group presented a draft report of its work to the Committee (ACM 1203a). At that meeting the ACMSF agreed the report should be the subject of a public consultation exercise. This public consultation took place between February 2016 and May 2016.
4. The group has considered consultation comments received from respondents. Accordingly, the group still considers that the risk level for UK hen shell eggs produced under the Lion Code, or under demonstrably-equivalent comprehensive schemes, should be 'VERY LOW'. Additionally, following consultation comments, the group agreed to explicitly state that there is a low degree of uncertainty associated with this assessment. The group still views that the risk for other shell eggs should be considered 'LOW'.
5. In practical terms, the Group considers that the 'VERY LOW' risk level means that UK hen eggs produced under the Lion code, or under demonstrably equivalent comprehensive schemes, can be served raw or lightly cooked to all groups in society, including those that are more

vulnerable to infection¹, in domestic and non-domestic settings, including care homes and hospitals and this recommendation does not apply when non-Lion Code or imported eggs are used.

6. However, taking account of the responses received during consultation and the unresolved point of contention within the group, relating to eggs used in the non-domestic environment (Lion and non-Lion brand) being served raw or lightly cooked, including to vulnerable groups, the group considers it is necessary to more clearly highlight potential concerns relating to the non-domestic environment.
7. The group considers that the need to store eggs properly, to observe best before dates, and to avoid cross-contamination of eggs or temperature abuse within the kitchen environment, particularly where the egg contents will be consumed raw or lightly cooked, must not be forgotten or overlooked. The group unanimously agrees that factors such as these, which are more likely to be relevant in catering and institutional environments, than domestic environments (because of the larger number of eggs used, and catering practices such as pooling and storage of pooled eggs, with consequent increased risk of cross-contamination) increases the level of uncertainty associated with this risk assessment. The group has therefore highlighted that those involved with risk management may wish to take this increased uncertainty into account when considering the implications of these recommendations within non-domestic settings.
8. The report has been amended taking into account responses from the public consultation.

Members are invited to:

- Approve the attached ACMSF response (ACM/1219a) to the consultation for publication on the FSA website.
- Approve the report (ACM/1219b) and agree that it should be submitted to the FSA Chief Scientific Adviser for approval for final publication.

**Secretariat
June 2016**

¹ This recommendation is not intended to include severely immunocompromised individuals such as those undergoing transplant surgery etc. who will have a highly specialised and restricted diet that will not include foods such as eggs, but is intended to include vulnerable groups in general including pregnant women, the young and the elderly.