

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

INFORMATION PAPER

Egg advice for caterers

On 15 October 2009 the Food Standards Agency published online advice on the safe use of eggs in catering. This guidance (attached below) covers handling, storing and cooking eggs, using pasteurised egg, and catering for vulnerable groups. It also gives tips on 'pooling' eggs.

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Advice for caterers on handling eggs safely

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The Agency has published online advice on the safe use of eggs in catering. The guidance covers handling, storing and cooking eggs, using pasteurised egg, and catering for vulnerable groups. It also gives tips on 'pooling' eggs, where caterers break lots of eggs into a bowl and use the mix throughout the day.

Eggs may contain salmonella bacteria inside or on their shells, so it is very important for caterers to prevent bacteria spreading from eggs onto other foods, hands, work surfaces or utensils, and also to cook them properly so that any bacteria are killed.

Pooling eggs is a common practice in catering and it's important for caterers to be careful how they handle pooled eggs. They should avoid keeping large amounts of pooled liquid egg at room temperature – instead they should cover it, store it in the fridge and take out a small amount as and when needed.

Ideally, pooled liquid egg should be used on the same day, so caterers should only break the eggs they will need for the day and avoid storing the liquid egg for more than 24 hours. It's also important never to add new eggs to a batch of liquid egg – they should use one batch up and then start another.

Q and A

Eggs may contain salmonella bacteria inside or on their shells, so it's important to be careful how you handle them and how you use them. This is because salmonella can cause very serious illness, especially among more vulnerable people. Occasionally it can even cause death.

What are the main points to remember?

- Keep eggs away from other foods, when they are still in the shell and when you have cracked them open.
- Don't use damaged or dirty eggs.
- Be careful not to splash raw egg onto other foods, surfaces or dishes.

- If you are breaking eggs to use later (sometimes called ‘pooling’) keep the liquid egg in the fridge and take out small amounts as needed.
- Use all ‘pooled’ liquid egg on the same day and don’t add new eggs to top it up.
- Cook eggs and foods containing eggs thoroughly.
- Use pasteurised egg for raw or lightly cooked foods.
- Always wash and dry your hands thoroughly after touching eggs or working with them.
- Clean food areas, dishes and utensils thoroughly and regularly, using warm soapy water, after working with eggs.
- Serve egg dishes straight away, or cool them quickly and keep chilled.

What are the dangers?

There are two main things you need to avoid:

- bacteria spreading from eggs onto other foods, hands, work surfaces or utensils (cross-contamination)
- bacteria surviving because eggs aren’t properly cooked

Remember, salmonella bacteria can be on the shell as well as inside the egg, so to help stop bacteria spreading, you need to be very careful how you handle eggs, both when they are still in the shell and after you have cracked them open.

Keep eggs away from other foods. And always wash and dry your hands, and clean surfaces, sinks, dishes and utensils thoroughly, after working with eggs.

Cooking eggs properly kills bacteria, but bacteria will survive in foods that aren’t cooked thoroughly. This is why you shouldn’t use raw eggs in food intended for vulnerable groups, when they won’t be cooked – use pasteurised egg instead.

Who is most vulnerable?

Elderly people, babies, toddlers, pregnant women and people who are already unwell are most likely to become seriously ill from food poisoning. If you are catering for any of the people mentioned above, it’s especially important to use pasteurised egg for foods that won’t be cooked (or will be only lightly cooked). The safest option is to use pasteurised egg for all dishes, even those that are cooked.

If you do use raw eggs, use them only in dishes that are thoroughly cooked, or cook them until the white and the yolk are solid. This means you should avoid serving eggs with runny yolks to these people.

Which foods should I use pasteurised egg for?

You should use pasteurised egg in any food that won't be cooked (or will be only lightly cooked), for example home-made mayonnaise, Béarnaise and hollandaise sauces, some salad dressings, ice cream, icing, mousse, tiramisu and other desserts containing eggs. Pasteurised egg can be bought frozen, or in liquid or powder form.

If you buy commercially produced mayonnaise or sauces in jars, or ready-made icing, these will almost always have been made using pasteurised egg. Check the label and if you're not sure, ask the retailer or manufacturer.

Can I be sure that an egg is salmonella-free?

It isn't possible to guarantee that any egg will be free from salmonella, whatever the source or brand. So you need to be careful how you handle all eggs. There is a smaller chance that eggs from vaccinated flocks will contain salmonella, but you should still take care. Remember, it's always better to buy your eggs from a reputable supplier.

How should I store eggs?

- Store eggs in a cool, dry place, ideally in the fridge.
- Keep eggs apart from other foods.
- Clean the storage area regularly.
- Don't use eggs after the 'Best before' date.

How can I reduce the dangers if I use large numbers of eggs?

If you use lots of eggs, you should be especially careful to avoid cross-contamination.

Ideally, you should do all your work with raw eggs at one time. Remember that drips of egg and broken shells could spread bacteria. So you should dispose of the shells carefully, and thoroughly clean surfaces, sinks, dishes and utensils before starting a different type of work. All staff should wash their hands with warm water and soap, and dry them thoroughly, after working with eggs.

If you are breaking eggs to use later, do not keep large amounts of 'pooled' liquid egg at room temperature. Cover it and store it in the fridge and take out a small amount when you need it. Never use the same utensils with raw egg that you are going to use to serve cooked food.

Ideally, pooled liquid egg should be used on the same day, so only break the eggs you will require for the day and avoid storing the liquid egg for more than 24 hours. Never add new eggs to a batch of liquid egg – use one batch up and then start another.