

Eggs are Safe to Consume

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This summer there was a voluntary recall of eggs from two egg farms in Iowa. The recall was due to a *Salmonella* Enteritidis (SE) outbreak associated with the two egg farms and this raised concern about the safety of consuming eggs. However, consumers can be confident that the U.S.'s eggs are safe. The number of eggs involved in the recall amounted to less than one percent of the total eggs produced in the U.S. And, the egg farms involved in the recall cooperated with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ensure that no additional illnesses occurred.

While SE can be a human health problem, the chance of an egg being contaminated is small (about one in 20,000). Also, the tough food safety procedures used in the egg industry prevent contamination. To prevent contamination, the egg industry uses sanitary housing systems, biosecurity programs, cleans and sanitizes poultry houses and farms, and conducts regular testing for SE. Cleaning and inspecting eggs also is done to prevent contamination.

Eggs in the recall were contaminated by chickens that do not show signs of illness. The SE infects the chicken's ovaries and is in the egg before the shell is formed. Therefore, despite all that the egg industry does to prevent outbreaks, it is critical that consumers use proper food storage and preparation techniques too. Like meat, poultry, dairy products, and other foods, eggs need to be stored in the refrigerator, cooked thoroughly, and eaten without delay.

The symptoms of SE infection are fever, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea. The symptoms usually begin within 12 to 72 hours after consuming contaminated food. The illness can last up to seven days. Most people will recover without treatment, but some may be ill enough to require hospitalization. As with any foodborne illness, infants, elderly, and those with impaired immune systems are the most vulnerable to serious illness.

To ensure that eggs are safe to consume and to prevent SE infection:

- Keep eggs refrigerated ($\leq 45^{\circ}$ F) and stored in the back of the refrigerator (not in the door) and in their carton
- Do not consume cracked or dirty eggs
- Wash hands, cooking utensils, and food preparation surfaces with soap and water after they come into contact with raw eggs
- Cook eggs until the white and yolk are both firm
- Eat eggs without delay after cooking them
- Refrigerate leftovers within two hours
- Do not eat raw eggs
- Use pasteurized eggs in homemade ice cream, eggnog, dressings, sauces, etc. (in any recipe that calls for raw eggs)
- Restaurants should always use pasteurized eggs in any recipe that calls for raw eggs

Eggs should be cooked until they are thickened and there is no visible sign of liquid. Foods containing eggs need to be cooked to a temperature above 160° F to destroy potential bacteria.

With proper egg storage, preparation, and cooking methods, consumers can be confident that eggs are a safe protein source for their diet.