

Advice to catering establishments on good egg handling and hygiene practices

Some eggs can contain the 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 people who are vulnerable to infection (such as pregnant women, children and the elderly). In severe cases, salmonella food poisoning can cause death.

Sourcing eggs

Caterers should always buy eggs from reputable suppliers which are able to demonstrate the traceability and provenance of their supply.

Due to the risk of salmonella, it is best practice to purchase UK eggs and source them from a reputable supplier which uses eggs from flocks which are part of a scheme which vaccinates chickens. This reduces the chance that eggs will have salmonella inside or on the shells.

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

There has been a major reduction in the microbiological risk from Salmonella in UK hen shell eggs, and this is especially the case for eggs produced under the Lion code Quality Scheme. It should be noted that the risk from non-UK eggs has not been reduced to the same extent.

Although eggs produced from UK vaccinated flocks present a lower risk, it is not possible to guarantee that any egg will be free from salmonella, whatever the source or brand. So you still need to be careful how you handle all eggs. Remember it's always better to source your eggs from a reputable supplier.

The FSA is reminding caterers of the following good egg hygiene and handling practices:

- Store eggs in a cool, dry place, ideally in the fridge, and clean the storage area regularly;
- 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;
- Use pasteurised eggs for raw or lightly cooked egg dishes
- 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
- Non-hen eggs such as duck, goose and quail eggs should always be cooked thoroughly

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.

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