

News Release

**Faye Malek, Family Living Educator
Manitowoc County UW-Extension
P.O. Box 1150, 4319 Expo Drive
Manitowoc, WI 54221-1150**

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Spring is great time for eggs

It's the season to enjoy the great outdoors and celebrate special occasions, like Easter and Passover. While eggs are used throughout the year, they are especially important for many spring activities. They are used for cooking, for decorating and, for the big Easter egg hunt.

Like all perishable foods, such as meat, poultry, seafood, and produce, eggs need to be handled properly to prevent foodborne illness. Occasionally, eggs with clean, uncracked shells can be contaminated with bacteria.

If foods containing harmful bacteria are consumed, they can cause foodborne illness. That's why it's important to cook eggs thoroughly and use a food thermometer to make sure egg-containing foods reach a safe internal temperature.

Here are some recommendations for a safe egg usage.

Clean Up

- Before you begin preparing dishes, remember that clean hands are key. Always wash hands with hot, soapy water before and after food preparation, as well as when you're handling raw animal products, such as raw eggs.
- Beware of cross-contamination. Foodborne illness can occur when kitchen equipment is not thoroughly washed between uses. Always wash surfaces and cooking equipment, including blenders, in hot, soapy water before and after food preparation.

Cook and Keep Cool

- Bacteria can multiply in moist foods, including desserts and salads containing high-protein foods. Refrigeration slows bacterial growth, so it's important to refrigerate eggs and egg-containing foods.
- Remember the Two-Hour Rule: Don't leave perishables out at room temperature for more than two hours. Bacteria love to grow in protein-rich foods.
- Whether you like your breakfast eggs scrambled or fried, always cook eggs until the yolks and whites are firm.
- Tasting is tempting, but licking a spoon or tasting raw cookie dough from a mixing bowl can be risky. Bacteria could be lurking in the raw eggs.
- Cook cheese cakes, lasagna, baked ziti, and egg dishes to an internal temperature of at least 160° F. Use a food thermometer to check.

Before the hunt:

- Wash your hands thoroughly before handling eggs at every preparation step, including cooking, cooling, dyeing, and hiding. Only use eggs that have been refrigerated and discard eggs that are cracked or dirty.
- When cooking, place a single layer of eggs in a saucepan. Add water to at least one inch above the eggs. Cover the pan, bring water to a boil, and carefully remove the pan from the heat. Let the eggs stand (18 minutes for extra large eggs, 15 minutes for large, 12 minutes for medium). Immediately run cold water over the eggs. When the eggs are cool enough to handle, place them in an uncovered container in the refrigerator where they can air-dry.
- When decorating, be sure to use food grade dyes. It is safe to use commercial egg dyes, liquid food coloring, and fruit-drink powders. When handling eggs, be careful not to crack them. Otherwise, bacteria could enter the egg through the cracks in the shell.
- Keep hard-cooked Easter eggs refrigerated until just before the hunt. Keep them fully chilled by storing them on a shelf inside the refrigerator, not in the refrigerator door.
- Consider buying one set of eggs for decorating only and another set for eating.

During and after the hunt:

- Hide the eggs in places that are protected from dirt, pets and other sources of bacteria. To prevent bacterial growth, don't let eggs sit in hiding places for more than two hours.
- Discard any eggs that were cracked, dirty, or that children didn't find within two hours. Place the eggs back in the refrigerator until it's time to eat.

If you have questions or concerns about food safety, contact the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at (800) 535-4555 or TTY (800) 256-7072. You can also contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Food Information Line at (888) SAFE FOOD, or visit the Fight BAC!® Web site at www.fightbac.org.

If you have questions or concerns about eggs, contact the American Egg Board at www.aeb.org or the Egg Nutrition Center at www.enc-online.org. If you have trouble accessing these resources, do not hesitate to call our office at 683-4168.

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