



*The Voice for Safe Food*

***Handling eggs and other foods safely will help keep you feeling great during Easter and Passover***

Seeing your first robin may be the sign of warm things to come, but once Easter and Passover have arrived, you know that Spring is here! Interestingly, both Easter and Passover include the wondrous egg, as a springtime symbol of new life, in their festivities. We all know the Bunny brings Easter eggs, but what many folks don't know, is that Passover Seders (ceremonial meals) typically include a hard-boiled egg course. Additionally, many recipes for Passover, which is also known as the "feast of unleavened bread," call for eggs or egg whites which take the place of yeast and other leavenings.

**Eggs are a symbol of new life. Enjoy them but be aware of the risks they carry.**

If not handled smartly, eggs can cause food poisoning because *salmonella* is a common bacterium found in uncooked, unbroken eggs. *Salmonella* can be present on both the outside and the inside of eggs. Stop Foodborne Illness, the national advocacy group that educates people on being food safe (<http://stopfoodborneillness.org>), has some good advice on how to keep your holiday "eggstravaganza" pathogen-free.

The bad news is ... some things you should know about *salmonella* poisoning:

- Typical symptoms are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramps, and fever.
- Symptoms usually last, at least, a couple of days.
- Susceptibility and severity is generally associated with babies, and young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and others with compromised immune systems. However, anyone can get ill from *salmonella*.
- Severe cases can be life-threatening.

The good news is that there are safe ways to handle and prepare eggs! If you follow these guidelines from Stop Foodborne Illness, you and yours will be much more likely to have a fun and safe holiday!



**Always choose clean and fresh eggs.** When purchasing eggs, open the carton and make sure they're clean, and intact. Handle with care: Chickens can harbor *Salmonella* without showing any signs of being sick, so all unpasteurized eggs -- even those that are fresh, organic, or unbroken -- can contain *Salmonella*. Buying in-shell pasteurized eggs reduces that risk. **Wash your hands thoroughly.** Everybody, including children, must wash their

hands with soap and water before and after handling eggs – which includes prepping, cooking, cooling, dyeing, hiding and hunting them.

**Be smart with Easter eggs.** Decorating eggs for the holiday is a joy, but do it safely by using only food-safe dyes. **Use care when hiding eggs** outside or in. The total time for hiding and hunting eggs should not exceed 2 hours. Avoid areas where eggs would come in contact with pets, wild animals, birds, or lawn chemicals. Eating eggs that have been on the ground is not recommended. Don't hide cracked eggs because bacteria could contaminate the inside. Cracked eggs should never be used. A good alternative is to use plastic Easter eggs for the hunt, and save the real eggs for eating.

**Refrigerate, refrigerate, refrigerate - your eggs at 40°F or below.** Safely storing and cooking your eggs before consumption is important. When storing eggs make sure they go inside the fridge, not the fridge door. Once hard-cooked, refrigerated eggs can be stored for up to one week. Eggs can be out of refrigeration for 2 hours (when it's under 90°F) and still be safe to eat. Colored eggs being used as decoration (for several hours or days) should not be eaten. Even though eggs will show signs of spoilage (taste, smell, appearance) when they're past the "best by" date, we don't recommend using this as an indicator of an egg's safeness – mainly because eggs that harbor *Salmonella* taste, smell, and appear exactly the same as "normal" eggs.

#### **Avoid cross-contamination and cook eggs thoroughly**

- Using soap and water, wash your hands and all surfaces that may have had contact with raw eggs. This includes countertops, pots and pans, utensils and dishes.
- Don't let in-shell eggs, raw whites or yolks cross contaminate foods that will be eaten raw.
- Eggs should be cooked until the egg white and yolk are firm. A lightly cooked egg with a runny yolk increases your chance of pathogenic contamination. If a recipe calls for lightly cooked eggs, we recommend using pasteurized egg products.
- Dishes with eggs in the recipe must be cooked to a safe internal temperature of 160°F (71°C)
- Eggs should be eaten or refrigerated within 2 hours after cooking.
- Do not eat eggs that have been left at room temperature for more than 2 hours.

#### **Know the safest way to boil eggs**

According to Deirdre Schlunegger, Chief Executive Officer of Stop Foodborne Illness, when cooking hard-boiled eggs, place a single layer of eggs in a saucepan. Cover the eggs with at least one inch of water. When the water is at a full boil, remove the pan from the heat source and let the eggs stay in the water for between 12-18 minutes, depending on the size of the eggs. After the eggs have set for the appropriate amount of time, run cold water over them. When the eggs are cooled enough to handle, put them in the refrigerator.

If you and your loved ones celebrate the holidays at a restaurant, and the dish calls for lightly cooked eggs—as some sauces do—ask your server if the dish can be prepared using pasteurized eggs, or liquid egg products, when possible.



### **Some other Spring holiday food safety tips**

*Easter Ham:* If your Easter ham is prepared with a fresh, uncooked ham, be sure to cook it to an internal temperature of at least 145°F (63°C) and allow the ham to rest for a few minutes before serving. Always avoid cross-contamination from countertops, knives, dishes and pots and pans. Do not let the uncooked ham come into contact with foods you will eat raw.

If you purchase a pre-cooked Easter ham, which can be served cold or heated, be sure to re-heat leftovers to at least 140°F before serving.

*Beef brisket:* This is a popular Passover dish that nearly everyone enjoys if it is prepared well. This cut of meat needs to be cooked for a long time because it is less tender. Preferably, set the oven temperature to 350°F and no lower than 325°F. Place the brisket fat-side up. The brisket should be almost covered with water and the cooking pan should be lidded. Brisket should be cooked for about one hour per pound of meat to a safe temperature of 145°F (63°C). Avoid cross-contamination from the uncooked meat.

*Lamb:* Lamb is another popular dish for Easter and Passover. Remember that lamb should be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 145°F. Let it rest a few minutes before serving. As always, avoid cross-contamination with uncooked meat and juices.

### **Be smart with leftovers, too**

Making a little extra is almost a given at holiday time, as is taking home goody bags. Just remember to keep food safety in mind. Here are some tips for handling leftovers:

- Make an educated guess as to how much food you will need on the table, then refrigerate the leftovers.
- Prepared foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Put leftovers in air-tight containers for travel.
- For an extra-nice touch, purchase insulated bags and ice so that leftovers can stay ice-cold during your guests' long drive home.
- Remind your guests to put the goodies in the refrigerator as soon as they get home.



### **About Stop Foodborne Illness**

Stop Foodborne Illness is a national nonprofit, public health organization dedicated to preventing illness and death from foodborne pathogens by promoting sound food safety policy and best practices, building public awareness, and assisting those impacted by foodborne illness. For more food safety tips please visit [www.Stopfoodborneillness.org/awareness/](http://www.Stopfoodborneillness.org/awareness/). If you think you have been sickened from food, contact your local health professional. You may subscribe to receive Stop Foodborne Illness e-Alerts and eNews here: [www.Stopfoodborneillness.org/take-action/sign-up-for-e-alerts/](http://www.Stopfoodborneillness.org/take-action/sign-up-for-e-alerts/).

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