

IN THIS ISSUE: SAFETY DURING SPRING HOLIDAYS

Salmonella Safety During Easter & Passover

Introduction

As Easter or Passover quickly approaches, many families are preparing to celebrate. Celebrations may include dying and hunting for eggs or attending a large family feast. With many holidays, especially Easter, food safety should be prioritized to avoid risk of harmful bacterial infections. Brightly colored and decorated eggs are often the focus during the Easter holiday and increase the exposure to *Salmonella*.

Epidemiology

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *Salmonella* is the leading cause of foodborne illness, hospitalizations, and deaths in the United States.¹ Salmonellosis is spread person-to-person. Most common routes of transmission include contaminated food, contaminated water, contact with animals, or contact with others that are already sick with diarrhea through unwashed hands or sexual contact.¹ Common symptoms include: watery diarrhea that might have blood or mucus; stomach cramps (can be severe); headache; nausea; vomiting; and loss of appetite. Onset of symptoms can occur as quickly as 6 hours to 6 days after infection and can last 4-7 days.²



Easter Egg Safety

Eggs are an integral part of the Easter holiday and are often a common mode of transmission for food contaminated with *Salmonella*. Before any popular

Easter activities begin, egg safety is key. When purchasing eggs, only buy eggs that are in a refrigerated section and inspect the carton for any cracked eggs. Proper handwashing practices are encouraged before and after handling eggs.³

- **Dyeing eggs:** To ensure safety, return eggs to the refrigerator within 2 hours of hard boiling and dyeing them. If eggs are to be eaten, use egg dye that is food-grade. One safe suggestion is to make two sets of eggs, one for decorating and hiding, and another for eating.³
- **Hunting eggs:** the USDA does not recommend eating hard boiled eggs after hiding them or playing with them. Harmful bacteria can be picked up on cracked shells and then transferred to parts of the egg that will be consumed. Eggs should be hidden in places that are protected from dirt, birds, insects, pets, and other sources of bacteria. Hiding and hunting eggs should not exceed two hours. Any eggs that are to be eaten should be washed, re-refrigerated, and eaten within 2-4 days. Plastic eggs may also be used in place of real eggs.³
- **Decorations:** Some Easter traditions (Italian Easter bread) use dyed, cooked eggs as part of the decoration. After baking, either serve within 2 hours or refrigerate and use within 3-4 days.³
- **Blowing out eggshells:** Use only uncracked, refrigerated eggs to hollow out the shell for decorating. Raw eggs may contain *Salmonella*, so properly clean the egg in hot water and rinse with 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach per half cup of water. After blowing the egg, refrigerate the contents and use within 2-4 days.³

Purchasing Chicks and Ducklings

Easter can be a popular time to buy baby chicks, ducklings, and other poultry. Handling the poultry or touching their environment can increase the risk of exposure to bacteria like *Salmonella*. In the past 10 years, there have been several multi-state outbreaks that have been linked to backyard poultry, resulting in multiple illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths. To avoid risk of illness, practice good hand hygiene, especially after touching poultry, eggs, or anything in their environment. Do not kiss or snuggle poultry or eat or drink around them. Keep poultry and the supplies used to care for them outside of the house. Supervise children and make sure they wash their hands properly. Do not let children younger than 5 years touch the poultry, as they are more likely to get sick from bacteria like *Salmonella*.⁴

Easter Foods

Food is often associated with family celebrations for various spring holidays. Bacteria can ruin any family celebration, and it is important to keep food safe.

- If celebrating Passover, allow plenty of time to thaw a frozen brisket. Allow the brisket to reach an internal temperature of 145°F.⁵
- If celebrating Easter, ham is a popular choice for dinner. There are often several types to choose from and can have different preparation instructions. Fresh, uncooked ham should be cooked until internal temperatures reach 145°F. Ready-to-eat hams can be served cold or heated to warm. Lamb is also another popular food to serve and must be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 145°F.⁵ Cooked hams should not be left at room temperature for more than 2 hours, if temperature is 90° F or higher, reduce time to one hour.⁶
- With all foods, read food labels for refrigeration instructions and proper storage.

Reporting

The list of reportable communicable diseases and reporting forms can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/WashoeDiseaseReporting>

Report communicable diseases to Northern Nevada Public Health. To report a communicable disease, please call 775-328-2447 or fax your report to the NNPH at 775-328-3764.

Acknowledgement

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NNPH wishes everyone happy and safe spring celebrations.

References

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