

Producing Safe Eggs at Home

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This advice is intended for home egg producers, it will help you to understand how to produce safe eggs and meet your legal obligations.

Note: If you intend to sell eggs to an egg business, food business, at a market, or by way of wholesale, you must comply with the Food Standards Australia, Standard 4.2.5 Primary Production and Processing Standard for Eggs and Egg Product. As such you will be required to develop and implement a basic food safety management statement. For assistance with the food safety management statement or to obtain a copy of the template, please contact the Food Safety Management Officer listed at the end of the document.

Eggs are a nutritious food but have the potential to cause illness as they can become contaminated with bacteria that can cause food poisoning. Clean, intact, fresh eggs are unlikely to cause a problem. However, if eggs are cracked or dirty, bacterial contamination of the internal contents of the egg can occur, and there is a higher risk of illness from consuming the eggs. Bacteria that live in dirt, feathers or bird droppings can enter the egg through cracks that are sometimes too fine to see. Once inside the egg, these bacteria quickly multiply to levels that can make people sick. As an egg producer, you need to understand how eggs can become contaminated and how to manage these hazards.

Keeping records for traceability

Record keeping helps with tracing the source of any outbreaks of food borne illness. You must keep a record of your eggs sold or supplied to the general public. The evidence of your egg sales can be documents such as invoices, diary entries, or the forms from the food safety management plan, that show when and how many eggs you sold on a particular day.

Managing the hazards in egg production

As a home egg producer, you are responsible for managing the food safety hazards that arise from the time eggs are laid until they leave your control. The following advice describes good practice in egg production and handling. It will help you to manage hazards and ensure the eggs you produce and sell are safe for human consumption.

Looking after your birds

Keep sheds clean – regularly remove manure and broken eggs, and replace nesting material frequently.

- Keep your birds healthy – provide fresh, high quality feed and clean water daily.
- Isolate sick birds and seek veterinary advice promptly if hens appear sick.
- Discard eggs from birds that appear sick or off their feed.
- If treating birds with a veterinary medicine, check the label and don't sell eggs if there is a withholding period. If you are unsure, seek advice from your vet.

Egg collection

- Collect eggs at least once a day – more often in warmer weather. The less time an egg remains in the nest, the lower the risk of contamination.
- If you come across a nest of eggs that you didn't previously know about, do not sell them – you have no idea how old the eggs are.
- Do not sell or supply cracked or dirty eggs. If an egg is cracked or dirty it's more likely to contain *Salmonella*, which is why it is not permitted under the standard.

INFORMATION SHEET

Handling and cleaning eggs

Wet washing of eggs is not recommended for home producers because there is an increased risk of contamination if washing conditions are not precisely controlled. Washing removes the protective cuticle from the eggshell and can increase penetration of bacteria inside the egg.

To clean an egg the following procedure is recommended:

- Wash your hands before and after handling eggs to avoid spreading bacteria.
- Clean lightly soiled eggs with a clean, dry, abrasive cloth.
- Sanitise or dispose of cleaning cloths frequently.

Checking eggs for cracks

Candling is the best method for checking for cracks, it involves placing eggs in front of a bright light, which penetrates the egg, making the contents visible. This technique reveals fine cracks and other faults that cannot be seen otherwise. Discard those with hairline cracks, thin shells and other visible faults.

Egg Stamping, packaging and labeling

Eggs must be sold in new single use cartons; reusing egg cartons can cause contamination of eggs. You must not sell your eggs in another egg producer's carton. This would misrepresent who has produced the eggs.

If you intend to sell eggs to an egg business, food business, at a market, or by way of wholesale, you must ensure that the eggs produced for sale or supply are stamped with the hand held stamp kit provided by Biosecurity Tasmania. You must ensure that each egg is stamped in such a manner that it is legible. The egg stamping kit provided has a unique code that is traceable back to your property. No other marks are to be used on the eggs.

Note: If you have less than 20 egg laying birds and only supplying eggs to work colleagues, friends and family you are not required to stamp your eggs.

Labeling of cartons must include at a minimum:

- a) Your name, and contact details.
- b) A best before date. (Maximum of thirty five (35) days from date of packing is recommended.)
- c) A form of identification such as batch number (the best before date can act as your batch number).

Storing and transporting

- Store eggs so the oldest eggs are used first. Use the *First in First Out* method (FIFO)
- Keep eggs cool during storage and transport – eggs keep best between 15 and 20°C. Don't leave eggs in direct sunlight for even short periods, or near equipment that generates heat, for example the back of a fridge, or near a stove.
- Avoid large temperature fluctuations during storage and transport – this can cause condensation on the egg surface, which can permit surface bacteria to transfer into the egg.
- If you have any doubt about the safety of eggs or have eggs that are past their best before date then throw them away.

For further information, please contact:

Food Safety Management Officer

Product Integrity Branch

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