Have a Safe Eggceptional Easter!

Easter is here and your children would like to dye eggs, but is it safe? Dyeing eggs has become a long known tradition for many families, but over the years food safety has become a big concern. Salmonella has become a key buzzword related to eggs and egg handling. What is salmonella, and how does it affect you? Salmonella is a bacteria commonly found in animals, especially birds and reptiles, therefore it is found in animal derived food products such as eggs and egg products along with many other foods. It is a foodborne infection that can cause illness especially in young children, the elderly and immune compromised. When fighting foodborne infections, prevention is the key and includes avoiding cross contamination, washing hands and utensils with warm, soapy water, cooking food thoroughly and refrigerating all leftovers promptly.

During this time of year eggs are handled more than usual and each handling provides the opportunity for bacteria to come into contact with the egg. It is very important, therefore, that you always wash your hands (with soap and warm water) before handling your eggs at every step. This includes cooking, cooling, dyeing and hiding. The following are some safety tips on how you can keep your family safe while having fun decorating your Easter eggs.

When dyeing your eggs you do not want to dye eggs that have cracked during the cooking process. You may eat them without dyeing or use them in an egg dish. Make sure that they and all other hard-boiled eggs are stored in the refrigerator and consumed within one week. If you will not be dyeing your eggs right after cooking then place them in their original carton and store them in the refrigerator until dyeing time, this will decrease the chance for any bacteria to have the opportunity to grow. When you are ready to dye your eggs remove them from the refrigerator and have fun. Don't forget, use food coloring or a food grade dye to color your eggs. After dyeing you want to place the eggs into the refrigerator again until time to hide them.

Consider safe hiding areas for your eggs, you want to avoid any areas where the egg may come in contact with bacteria. Once the eggs are found, if they are not to be eaten right away, once again, they need to be put in the refrigerator. You should never eat an egg that has been out of the refrigeration for more than two hours, also if the egg has become cracked during hiding, do not eat it. To be safe the time that it takes to hide and find the eggs should be less than two hours. As a safe alternative, you may want to choose to hide plastic eggs that contain prizes in them and save the hard-boiled eggs to eat after the egg hunt.

If you plan to use your decorated eggs as a centerpiece or other decoration where they will be out of refrigeration for more than two hours, do not consume those eggs and discard them once you are finished.

Many recipes for bunny shaped cakes or other Easter treats may call for raw egg white frosting. However, anytime raw eggs are eaten there is a risk of Salmonella food poisoning. Therefore, it would be wise to find a frosting recipe that uses a hot syrup and egg white. If the egg white mixture reaches 160°F it should be safe. Other alternatives include using a pasteurized powdered meringue available where cake-decorating supplies are sold.
Always remember, "If in Doubt, Throw it Out!" It is always better to be safe than sorry because the bacteria that cause foodborne illness cannot be detected through taste, sight or smell. If you have any further questions or concerns or would like more information on this topic or many others, contact your local Extension Office. In Osceola County contact Mary Beth Salisbury, Family & Consumer Sciences at 321-697-3000.

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