

Expert says frying pan may be best weapon against Salmonella in eggs

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(PhysOrg.com) -- As investigators track a Salmonella outbreak that has forced the recall of more than 500 million eggs, a specialist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences says consumers have a simple means of protecting themselves from food-borne illness.

Two Iowa farms are linked to a salmonellosis outbreak that has sickened as many as 1,300 people across more than a dozen states. Penn State food safety specialist Martin Bucknavage said while it is unlikely that any of the recalled [eggs](#) are in the northeastern region of the country, consumers can protect themselves by thoroughly cooking or boiling any egg products before consuming them.

"We have to realize that there's always the potential that an egg can be contaminated with Salmonella," he said. "Penn State researchers have done a lot of work with the state Agriculture Department and industry groups to help egg producers reduce the incidence of Salmonella in eggs. But we have to remember that it's still possible for Salmonella to be present."

Bucknavage explained that Salmonella bacteria can enter the egg through infected chickens, so the organism can contaminate both the outside and inside of the egg from the time it is laid -- the only foodborne pathogen that has that capability.

"Infected chickens are often asymptomatic, which is why food-safety experts raise so many caveats about consuming raw eggs in any form," he said. "However, cooking your eggs thoroughly will kill the Salmonella, so you can eat eggs with no concern."

"Any process in which the whites or yolks are insufficiently cooked -- yielding whites or yolks that are still liquid -- provides the potential for Salmonella to survive. If you are making something such as a Hollandaise sauce, go to the store and buy a pasteurized egg product. There's no reason that we need to take a risk of having [Salmonella](#) when we're handling raw eggs."

Bucknavage said one possible reason for the many cases of salmonellosis from the recent outbreak is that many consumers may not realize what "thorough cooking" entails. For instance, he said, eggs fried sunny-side-up or over-easy are only partially cooked and still can harbor [bacteria](#).

"Another problem is how we handle egg shells after cracking," Bucknavage said. "It is a common practice for people to place open shells on the counter, allowing for residual egg material to drip onto a surface where it can cross-contaminate other food items. Proper handling and preparing of eggs will help ensure the safety of our food and the wellbeing of those who consume it."

More information: You can find more information on ways to manage the risk of Salmonella and other foodborne illnesses at Penn State's Food Safety website at extension.psu.edu/food-safety

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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