



EPF Position Statement: Washing Eggs in the Home

There has recently been some media coverage regarding the issue of *Salmonella* in terms of egg food safety.

The risk of contracting food poisoning from consuming eggs is very low in New Zealand. A recent study performed by Environmental Science & Research (ESR) found that none of the eggs sampled had *Salmonella* present inside the egg, and only 1.8% had *Salmonella* present on the outside of the shell.

However, while the overall risk is very low, it is best to be cautious when handling eggs, cooking them where possible, and taking particular care when recipes call for raw eggs to be used (e.g. mayonnaise, mousse).

Based on the ESR research, in New Zealand, the most likely source of contamination is the external surface of the shell. You should not buy eggs that are visibly soiled with feathers or smeared with bird droppings - under New Zealand legislation, shell eggs must be visibly clean, so if your eggs are visibly soiled, you should return them to the supplier.

Poultry veterinarian Neil Christiansen suggests: “home producers of eggs should provide clean nest boxes and collect the eggs daily. Eggs found in various places around the garage or yard should be avoided, as hen owners may not know how long ago the eggs were laid. Not only will the level of bacteria that has passed through the shell be unknown, but the bacteria will have had an unknown length of time in which to multiply. Salmonellae do not multiply well in egg white, due to the egg's natural defences, but as eggs age, these defences become less reliable.”

Michael Brooks

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