

New FDA regulation to reduce *Salmonella* illnesses

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Photo: Alessandro Paiva

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced today a regulation expected to prevent illness and deaths caused by consumption of eggs contaminated with the bacterium *Salmonella enteritidis*.

The final rule requires preventive measures during the production of shell eggs in poultry houses and requires subsequent refrigeration during storage and transportation.

Implementing the preventive measures would reduce the number of *Salmonella enteritidis* infections from eggs by nearly 60 percent.

Salmonella enteritidis can be found inside eggs that appear perfectly normal. If the eggs are eaten raw or undercooked, the bacterium can cause illness.

Eggs in the shell become contaminated on the farm, primarily because of infection in the laying hens.

Under the rule, egg producers must:

- Buy chicks and young hens only from suppliers who monitor for *Salmonella* bacteria
- Establish rodent, pest control, and biosecurity measures to prevent spread of bacteria throughout the farm by people and equipment
- Conduct testing in the poultry house for *Salmonella enteritidis*. If the tests find the bacterium, a representative sample of the eggs must be tested over an 8 week time period (4 tests at 2 week intervals); If any of the four egg tests is positive, the producer must further process the eggs to destroy the bacteria, or divert the eggs to a non-food use
- Clean and disinfect poultry houses that have tested positive for *Salmonella enteritidis*
- Refrigerate eggs at 45 degrees Fahrenheit temperature during storage and transportation no later than 36 hours after the eggs are laid.

Egg producers whose eggs receive treatments such as pasteurization still must comply with the refrigeration requirements. Similarly, certain persons such as distributors, packers, or truckers holding or transporting shell eggs also must comply with the refrigeration requirements.

“Preventing harm to consumers is our first priority,” said Margaret A. Hamburg, M.D., Commissioner of Food and Drugs. “Today’s action will prevent thousands of serious illnesses from *Salmonella* in eggs.”

Salmonella is an organism which can cause serious and sometimes fatal infections in young children, frail or elderly people, and others with weakened immune systems. Healthy persons infected with *Salmonella* often experience fever, diarrhea (which may be bloody), nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. In rare circumstances, infection with *Salmonella* can result in the organism getting into the bloodstream and producing more severe illnesses such as arterial infections (i.e., infected aneurysms), endocarditis and arthritis.