

PENNY SAVER NEWS

Sept 4, 2014

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

Keeping Eggs Safe

Now that school is in session some families are getting back in the habit of packing lunches. A hard cooked egg can be quick, easy to pack, and an inexpensive good protein food. Most people seem to think that raw eggs are risky and that boiled eggs are safe because they've been cooked. Read on for a surprise.

Here in the US fresh eggs are washed and chilled as they are collected. This removes any dirt or fecal material they picked up. That means there are a lot less bacteria to contaminate the carton or your fingers when you handle it. It also removes some of the natural oil the chicken leaves on the egg. These oils help to seal the pores in the egg shell. To replace that oil eggs are given a very thin wash of food wax. Wax seals the pores and prevents other bacteria from sneaking into the egg.

Then, because we ship our food further, store it longer, and don't want to go grocery shopping every day, our eggs are refrigerated. In many countries eggs are not refrigerated. But in most of those places people go to the market every day, and buy just what they'll need for one or two days. Eggs are safe for some time without refrigeration, *if* they have not been refrigerated first.

Most of the time a freshly laid egg will not have any bacteria inside. But if it has been chilled then bacteria on the shell might have been pulled inside as the egg cooled and contracted. So once an egg has been refrigerated it should be kept cold. And we do know that sometimes there are bacteria inside a fresh egg, picked up from the chicken. For these reasons it's a good idea to keep all fresh eggs cold.

How long will they be safe, if they're kept cold? USDA has published at least one study where they kept eggs refrigerated for 3 months, testing them a few at a time. At the end of 3 months the eggs were still safe. They could make a cake, a good omelet, and even beat up a meringue with them. So if you're using your eggs within several weeks, you don't need to worry.

But, and this is what surprises most people, once you boil that egg, now you need to use it in 5 days or less! Even boiled eggs kept in the refrigerator should be used that quickly. And cooked eggs must be kept refrigerated at *all times!* Why?

A fresh egg is still alive. It still has enzymes that will be able to attack any bacteria that manage to squeeze through pores. Once it is cooked, enzymes are no longer active. Also, eggs have iron that bacteria need to grow. In a fresh egg the iron is tied up and the bacteria can't get it. In a cooked egg the iron is released. Then bacteria can use it. So now the egg is doubly good food for any bacteria. If a few get through the shell, they'll grow fast, unless the egg is too cold. So keep those boiled eggs cold!

If you send boiled eggs to school in a lunch bag, or take them to work yourself, be sure to either refrigerate the lunch or include an ice pack or frozen juice box. Make sure they're not warm for more than 2 hours. Otherwise, throw them out.

If you have favorite recipes that use eggs that are not cooked later, you can use liquid egg products. Or you can buy fresh eggs that have been pasteurized in the shell. These eggs were heated just enough to kill Salmonella, but not enough to cook the egg. They're raw, fresh, and work just fine for cooking. Each egg has a red P in a circle stamped on it. Publix sells the Davidson's brand in this area. But like all other eggs, once they've been boiled, keep them cold!

Make these easy wraps the night before, wrap each one in a paper towel, and reheat for 20-30 seconds in the microwave for some super-quick before-school breakfasts!

Breakfast Speedy Wraps

2 slices turkey bacon, chopped	¼ cup chopped sweet bell pepper
¼ tsp Mexican or taco seasoning	2 eggs
¼ cup chopped tomato	2 8-inch whole wheat flour tortillas

Warm tortillas in oven or microwave. Coat nonstick skillet with cooking spray. Heat over medium heat. Add bacon, cook until browned. Add pepper and seasoning. Cook for 3 minutes, stirring once or twice. Beat eggs in small bowl. Add eggs to skillet. Cook without stirring until eggs begin to set. Lift edges of cooked egg so liquid flows underneath. Keep cooking and lifting until egg is completely cooked but still moist. Remove from heat, stir in tomato. Spoon onto tortillas and roll up. Serve with salsa if desired. Serve hot, or wrap, refrigerate and reheat. Serves 2.

Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M., University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.