
Holiday egg safety tips

When it comes to food safety, the holidays can definitely put us to the test. We *know* we should refrigerate our leftovers right away, but inevitably we find ourselves in the kitchen, picking and nibbling at the remains of the turkey that was served hours earlier.

But if you had to choose just one holiday ritual as the single most dangerous from a food safety standpoint, it would have to be the venerable Easter egg hunt. Think about it: We take highly perishable morsels of food and stash them *outside*, under old logs, behind fence posts or just out in the blazing sun - - maybe for *hours* -- and then send our children to gather them up and eat them! It's a wonder any of us survives past the age of 6.

If you're planning to decorate Easter eggs this year, or if you're preparing hard-cooked eggs for your Passover seder, here are a dozen egg safety tips to help you and your family stay healthy.

Use one set of eggs for decorating and hunting, and another for eating. Or to be *really* safe, use plastic eggs for your Easter egg hunt instead of real ones.

Keep everything clean. Wash utensils, countertops and other surfaces that eggs come in contact with. That includes washing your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water before and after handling raw eggs or cooked eggs that will be eaten.

Coloring Easter eggs can be fun, but if you're planning to eat the eggs you dye, make sure that you only use food-grade dyes.

Keep hard-cooked eggs intended for eating in the refrigerator until the last possible minute.

Check the temperature of your refrigerator with an appliance thermometer to make sure that it is at 40°F or colder.

Under no circumstances let anyone eat eggs that have been unrefrigerated (whether at room temperature or outside) for more than two hours. That includes hard-cooked egg used as part of the Passover seder.

If you hollow out eggshells by blowing the raw egg through holes in the shell, you could expose yourself to salmonella from raw egg touching your mouth. To be safe, wash the egg in hot water and rinse it in a solution of 1 teaspoon chlorine bleach per half cup of water.

If you plan to use the raw eggs you have blown out of their shells, cook and eat them right away — don't try to store them.

When preparing hard-cooked eggs for an egg hunt, be on the lookout for cracks in the shells. Even tiny cracks can allow bacteria to contaminate the egg. Eggs that have any cracks whatsoever should be discarded.

If you're hiding eggs outside, choose the cleanest hiding places you can, and avoid areas that pets or other animals might visit.

Keep track of time to ensure that the hiding and hunting time don't exceed a cumulative 2 hours. And remember, the eggs that are found must be refrigerated right away — or discarded if the 2 hour limit is exceeded.

Nothing lasts forever! Even hard-cooked eggs that have been refrigerated properly must be eaten within 7 days of cooking.