

FDA NEWS RELEASE

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Media Inquiries: Susan Cruzan, 301-796-4675, susan.cruzan@fda.hhs.gov

Consumer Inquiries: 888-INFO-FDA

FDA: New Public Health Regulation to Improve Egg Safety and Reduce Salmonella Illnesses

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration today announced a regulation expected to prevent each year 79,000 cases of foodborne illness and 30 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.

Egg-associated illness caused by *Salmonella* is a serious public health problem. Infected individuals may suffer mild to severe gastrointestinal illness, short term or chronic arthritis, or even death. Implementing the preventive measures would reduce the number of *Salmonella enteritidis* infections from eggs by nearly 60 percent.

“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 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.

The rule requires that measures designed to prevent *Salmonella enteritidis* be adopted by virtually all egg producers with 3,000 or more laying hens whose shell eggs are not processed with a treatment, such as pasteurization, to ensure their safety.

Producers with at least 3,000 but fewer than 50,000 laying hens must comply within 36 months after the rule’s publication. Producers with 50,000 or more laying hens must be in compliance with the rule within 12 months after its publication in the Federal Register.

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.

To ensure compliance, egg producers must maintain a written *Salmonella enteritidis* prevention plan and records documenting their compliance. Producers (except those who have less than 3000 hens or who sell all their eggs directly to consumers) also must register with the FDA. The FDA will develop guidance and enforcement plans to help egg producers comply with the rule.

The FDA estimated that the rule would provide \$1.4 billion in annual public health benefits, at an annual cost of \$81 million to the regulated industry, or less than 1 cent per dozen eggs produced in the United States.

During the 1990s, the FDA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture implemented a series of post-egg production safety efforts such as refrigeration requirements designed to inhibit the growth of bacteria that may be in an egg. While these steps limited the growth of bacteria, they did not prevent the initial contamination from occurring.

The new rule is part of a coordinated strategy between the FDA and the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). The FDA and the FSIS will continue to work closely together to ensure that egg safety measures are consistent, coordinated, and complementary.

In addition to the new safety measures being taken by industry, consumers can reduce their risk of foodborne illness by following safe egg handling practices. The FDA reminds consumers to buy eggs that have been refrigerated, make sure eggs in the carton are clean and not cracked, and cook eggs and foods containing eggs thoroughly.

For more information:

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/Product-SpecificInformation/EggSafety/EggSafetyActionPlan/ucm170615.htm>