

25 July 2016

Dear Interested Party

**Review of advice to consumers (including vulnerable groups) on eating raw or lightly cooked shell eggs and their products in the UK**

An expert group, set up by the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF), to look at egg safety, found there has been a reduction in the risk from salmonella in UK shell eggs since its last report on this issue 15 years ago.

The Group concluded that the risk level for UK hen shell eggs produced under the Lion code, or produced under demonstrably-equivalent comprehensive schemes, should be considered as very low, whilst for other hen shell eggs, including non-UK eggs consumed in the UK, the risk level should be considered low. The report recommends that Lion code eggs (or eggs produced under equivalent schemes) can be served raw or lightly cooked to those in vulnerable groups, including pregnant women, the young and the elderly (but is not intended to include severely immunocompromised individuals).

Following finalisation of the ACMSF report in June 2016, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) have reviewed their consumer advice taking into account the independent committee's conclusions and recommendations. It is proposed that the FSA and FSS will continue to advise that all raw, soft-boiled hen eggs or foods containing lightly cooked hen eggs are unlikely to lead to illness in people who are in good health (who are not in a vulnerable group).

In addition, we will no longer advise against the consumption of raw and lightly cooked eggs by vulnerable groups provided that they are produced under the Lion code quality assurance scheme. This advice does not include severely immunocompromised individuals.

The existing advice on non-hen shell eggs (e.g. duck and quail eggs), which should not be consumed raw or lightly cooked, will not change.

The ACMSF report also considered it necessary to highlight more clearly potential concerns relating to the non-domestic environment. To this end, the FSA and FSS will soon issue advice for catering establishments on egg handling and hygiene practices.

The ACMSF report can be found at the link below. This report provides the expert scientific opinion which has informed the proposed changes to our consumer advice.

<http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/acmsf-egg-reportv1.pdf>

We would be grateful for your views on the proposal for our revised consumer advice which is enclosed with this letter.

In parallel with this consultation, the FSA and FSS are considering the mechanism for UK egg producers which are not currently part of the Lion code Scheme to demonstrate an equivalent level of food safety control. We are therefore also seeking views on this matter from egg producers and assurance bodies as part of this consultation.

Please send your comments to [Marianne.James@fss.scot](mailto:Marianne.James@fss.scot)

The consultation will end on Friday 16 September 2016.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Marianne James  
Food Protection Science and Surveillance  
Food Standards Scotland

# Review of advice to consumers (including vulnerable groups) on eating lightly cooked or raw shell eggs and their products in the UK

## **Current FSA/FSS advice**

The FSA/FSS have previously highlighted the risk associated with eating raw and lightly cooked eggs and issued public health advice on the safe handling and use of eggs.

FSA/FSS's advice historically has always been:

Eating raw eggs, eggs with runny yolks or any food that is uncooked or only lightly cooked and contains raw eggs may cause food poisoning, especially in 'at risk' groups such as pregnant women, the elderly and anyone who is unwell or immuno-compromised. This is because eggs may contain salmonella bacteria which can cause serious illness. People who are not in vulnerable groups who eat soft-boiled eggs or foods containing lightly cooked eggs should not experience any health problems, but cooking eggs thoroughly is the safest option if you are concerned about food poisoning.

## **Proposed revised advice**

### **People who are in good health (and are not in vulnerable groups)**

People who are in good health (who are not in vulnerable groups) can eat raw, soft-boiled hen eggs or foods containing lightly cooked hen eggs safely, and are unlikely to experience any health problems.

### **Vulnerable Groups<sup>1</sup>**

As well as people who are in good health, at risk groups such as infants, children, pregnant women, the elderly and those who are unwell can eat raw, soft-boiled hen eggs or foods containing lightly cooked hen eggs provided that they are produced under the Lion code quality assurance scheme.

The reason for this is that in recent years the presence of salmonella in UK hen shell eggs has been reduced greatly, this is particularly the case for those eggs produced under the Lion coded quality assurance scheme which comprises a suite of additional control measures.

### **General Advice**

When eating raw or lightly cooked eggs also bear in mind the importance of:

- storing eggs safely such as in the refrigerator
- following good hygiene practices in the kitchen
- observing best before dates

### **Non hen eggs**

Non hen eggs such as duck and quail eggs should always be cooked thoroughly.

Further information on the microbiological risk from shell eggs and their products can be found at <http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/acmsf-egg-reportv1.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup> This recommendation is not intended to include severely immunocompromised individuals such as those undergoing transplant surgery for example, who will have a highly specialised and restricted diet.