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Living Well

Chelsea Richmond, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent
K-State Research and Extension, Flint Hills District

Remember Food Safety When Decorating Easter Eggs

With Easter just around the corner, many families will be coloring dozens of eggs. While decorating Easter eggs is a tradition that can bring about much enjoyment, it is also important to remember food safety.

The main concern when dealing with eggs is Salmonella. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report 40,000 cases of Salmonella each year. However, many milder cases are not diagnosed or reported, so the actual number of infections may be thirty or more times greater. In order to decrease the risk of Salmonella, it is important to cook eggs properly and keep hands clean so as to not cross-contaminate with other foods. When purchasing eggs, make sure the eggs are not broken because cracked eggs could be contaminated. It is also important to keep eggs refrigerated.

To make hard cooked eggs, use eggs that are at least a week old. Place the eggs in a pan in a single layer and cover with water. Bring them to a boil, cover, and remove from heat. Let the eggs sit for about 15 minutes. Cool the eggs in a cold tap water or ice water.

Eggs can be decorated in a variety of ways. Egg dying kits are readily available and easy to use. Commercial egg decorating dyes are food safe, as is food coloring added to a water-vinegar mix. Natural dyes can be made from spices, fruit juice, and vegetables. Tea or coffee will provide a tan or brownish shade. Beet or cranberry juice will produce red dye. For green, use water from cooked spinach leaves; or for blue, use blueberry juice. Eggs can also be decorated with magic markers, paint, glitter, or even sequins.

When using hard cooked eggs for decorating, decide how you will use them after decorating. If you want to eat them, be sure to keep hands clean, use food safe dyes and decorations, and only allow eggs to be out of the refrigerator for two hours or less. Hard-boiled eggs in the shell should be used within 2-3 days if the shell has been removed. Uncooked egg contents from hollowed eggs should be used within a day or two.

Use caution, however, when consuming decorated hard-cooked eggs that have been used in an Easter egg hunt. Eggs that have been out of the refrigerator for more than two hours or hidden in contaminated areas should not be eaten. Alternatives include decorating a separate batch of eggs to use for hunting or filling plastic eggs with candy or money for a special treat.

As you spend time this Easter decorating eggs with your family, don't forget to keep important food safety reminders in mind. For more information regarding food safety, contact the Flint Hills Extension District office in Council Grove at (620) 767-5136 or the office in Cottonwood Falls at (620) 273-6491.