

What You Should Know About Avian Influenza

The main reason egg prices have climbed is that more than 166 million birds have been slaughtered to contain the avian influenza or “bird flu” virus, which has caused egg prices to soar and supply to be limited. The U. S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) policy has been to kill entire flocks anytime the virus is found on a farm. Government regulations currently require egg processors to wash and sanitize eggs that the USDA grades to remove germs from the shell.

You may wonder if eggs and other poultry products are still safe to eat. Here’s what is known about food safety amid the bird flu outbreak.

Will I catch bird flu from eating chicken or eggs?

No, the risk of catching bird flu from eating chicken or eggs is presently very low. There are no cases in the U.S. of bird flu from eating eggs or poultry when they are correctly prepared. People should always properly store, handle, and fully cook meat, poultry, and eggs to prevent foodborne illness. Cooking poultry, eggs, and other animal products to the proper temperature and preventing cross-contamination between raw and cooked food are the keys to preventing any food safety hazard.

How do I stay safe?

These practices will also protect against other foodborne illnesses.

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling raw poultry and eggs.
- Prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw poultry and eggs away from other cooked or ready-to-eat foods.
- After cutting raw meat, wash the cutting board, knife, and countertops with hot, soapy water.
- After cleaning, the next step is sanitizing to reduce any remaining bacteria to a safe level on all surfaces and utensils. Sanitize using a solution of ½ teaspoon chlorine bleach (5.25%) in 1 quart of water.
- Soft-boiled or raw eggs should not be used in food that will not be cooked.
- Cook eggs until they are no longer runny and cook all poultry until an internal temperature of 165°F is reached.
- Make sure you are only buying dairy products that are pasteurized.
- Do not eat raw dairy products.

What can you do about the cost of eggs?

Shift some of your protein choices to other types of protein, including meat, poultry, seafood, legumes, nuts, nut butter, and tofu, instead of relying on eggs in menu planning.

To “stretch” eggs in cooking, meaning make a smaller amount of eggs go further, you can add a small amount of liquid like water or milk while whisking to incorporate air, add vegetables to bulk up the dish, or mix in a thick dairy product like ricotta or cream cheese to increase volume without significantly altering the texture; essentially, you’re adding ingredients that will create a larger overall quantity without using more eggs themselves.

Eggs are multitaskers in simple baking recipes like quick breads, cakes, and cookies. Replacing eggs in recipes requires some knowledge. Eggs serve several purposes in baking. They contribute to the consistency, color, flavor, and structure of baked goods.

Ideas for breakfast switches from eggs include Greek yogurt with fresh fruit, a fruit smoothie, or oatmeal.

For more information on food safety, go to the University of Wyoming Community Vitality and Health Website at <https://uwyoextension.org>.

There is no evidence that bird flu can be transmitted to humans through properly cooked food, including eggs.