

Food Safety

What Happened?

A recent outbreak of salmonella and gastroenteritis on an offshore facility resulted in about 40 members of the workforce being directly affected and led to severe disruption of offshore operations. The strain of salmonella identified was reportedly linked to eggs. The use of raw eggs, which were incorrectly stored, is suspected to have been the cause of the food-borne illnesses.

One of the findings of the investigation into the incident was that raw eggs were being stored in the galley at room temperature for up to 24 hours and adjacent to hot appliances which, when in use, heated the eggs further. In addition, the raw eggs were being used to make products such as mayonnaise and tartare sauce.

During a recent planned inspection on a separate facility, a similar unrefrigerated storage arrangement for eggs was also observed.



What could go wrong?

Foods including meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dairy foods, gravies and cooked rice can become potentially hazardous as they support the growth of bacteria under certain conditions. These foods need to be kept at temperatures either below 5°C or above 60°C to prevent the growth of bacteria that may be present in the food which can lead to food poisoning.

In the case of eggs, salmonella can contaminate the contents of clean and intact shell eggs as a result of infections of the reproductive tissue of laying hens. A type of bacterium, salmonella, can be on both the outside and inside of eggs that appear to be normal, and if the eggs are eaten raw or lightly cooked, the bacterium can cause illness (gastroenteritis).

Key lessons

- Foods which can support the growth of bacteria need to be kept at temperatures either below 5°C or above 60°C to prevent the growth of any food poisoning bacteria that may be present in the food.

Specific food handling practices that are generally considered to be good practice include:

- Use only whole (i.e. uncracked), clean eggs.
- Store eggs under refrigeration, at or below 5°C.
- Thoroughly clean hands, surfaces and utensils before and after working with raw eggs.
- Keep all food containing raw egg well away from ready-to-eat foods (such as prepared salads or sandwiches) throughout preparation and storage.
- Use pasteurised egg products for foods that will not be cooked; such as mayonnaise, eggnog, salad dressings, mousse and tiramisu.
- If you choose to prepare dishes containing raw or undercooked egg you should prepare the dish as close to consumption as possible, using eggs you have just freshly broken open, store the dish under refrigeration between preparing and serving.
- Refrigerate any leftovers promptly, and discard these within 24 hours.

The legislation

Operators have a duty of care to “take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure that the facility is safe and without risk to the health of any person at or near the facility” as per Clause 9 of Schedule 3 to the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006*. Under subclause 9(2)(d) operators also have to take all reasonably practicable steps to implement and maintain systems of work at the facility that are safe and without risk to health. This subclause is as relevant to food handling practices on a facility as it is to activities which may expose workers to fire and explosion hazards.

Contact

For further information email alerts@nopsema.gov.au and quote Alert 53.