

# Poultry Salmonella

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food science at Penn State University, zeroed in on the recent furor over salmonella. Although the bacteria was isolated in 1885, recent northeastern outbreaks publicized by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* named the egg as a carrier of the salmonella virus.

Following ingestion of food containing the micro-organisms, victims develop gastrointestinal illnesses within six to 48 hours. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramps, headaches and nausea.

Research shows that the amount of bacterial that causes the virus varies from person to person. A healthy adult is less susceptible than the elderly and young children.

Although the news media has sensationalized the danger of eggs carrying salmonella, Mast offered a perspective on the problem. He pointed out that 350,000 people die annually from cancer linked



**Dr. Morris Mast** diseases; 23,500 from drunk driving; and 48 to 480 from

salmonellosis.

## Transmission

How does salmonella get into live poultry? Three sources are suspected:

•1. Feed transmission - Since heat easily destroys salmonella, the animal offal used for feed products are heated to destroy all possible existing bacterial such as salmonella. According to Mast, the only way feed can carry the bacterial is if salmonella was reintroduced after the feed was processed. This sometimes happens if trucks transporting feeds have been contaminated and not properly cleaned.

•2. Environmental contamination - This happens most frequently in food preparation if eggs or meat is not heated enough to kill the bacteria.

•3. Egg transmission - It is suspected but not actually confirmed that the virus may be transmitted when the egg is being formed if the hen is a carrier.

## Killing the virus

Viruses with non-harmful bacteria will fight and destroy salmonella. Currently research is being done in labs by introducing bacteria organisms found in mature poultry into those containing salmonella. Too weak to compete, the salmonella

strain dies.

Mast stressed that food when properly handled poses no threat of salmonella to people. That means consumers should never eat raw meat or uncooked eggs.

In the home and in the food industry, salmonella can always be eliminated if poultry and eggs are not consumed raw. On the flip side, statistics show that 77 percent of the salmonella outbreaks recorded are traceable to a food source. This most often happens at public eating places through improper handling of food. Twenty per cent of the cases happen in home food preparations.

When the source is identified, cooks often defend their improper food preparation habits by protesting, "But that's the way my mother always did it" or "but I often did that before."

The press publicizes that salmonella is carried through Grade A eggs. Does this mean that Grade AA or B eggs are safe?

"No," Mast emphasized and then explained that the term Grade A eggs is a form used for identification. Before the recent outbreak, consumers thought the disease was transmitted only through cracked or imperfect-shell quality eggs. Now, cases have been traced

where shell perfect eggs were suspected as containing the virus. Mast stressed, "Even if the egg does carry the germ, it can definitely be destroyed when heated."

Mast told the teachers, "Educators play a major role in stamping out the virus since children are impressionable. If proper cooking methods are taught, children will follow through."

## Food safety

•1. Never use the same platter, cutting board for prepared meat if it was used for raw meat.

•2. Do not eat raw eggs. Always heat the egg white enough to coagulate.

•3. Wood cutting boards are frequent carriers of the virus. Mast emphasized the importance of not reusing a cutting board without sanitizing it with bleach.

•4. Do not eat raw meat.

Mast emphasized that America's food supply is the safest of any country in the world. Eggs are no exception since chances of contacting salmonella through eggs are extremely slim.

Mast also assured the audience that current studies show that AIDS carriers cannot transmit the disease through food preparation.

In conclusion Mast said, "It is theoretically possible to have a salmonella free product, but not economically feasible with current technology unless consumers are willing to pay higher prices for the products."

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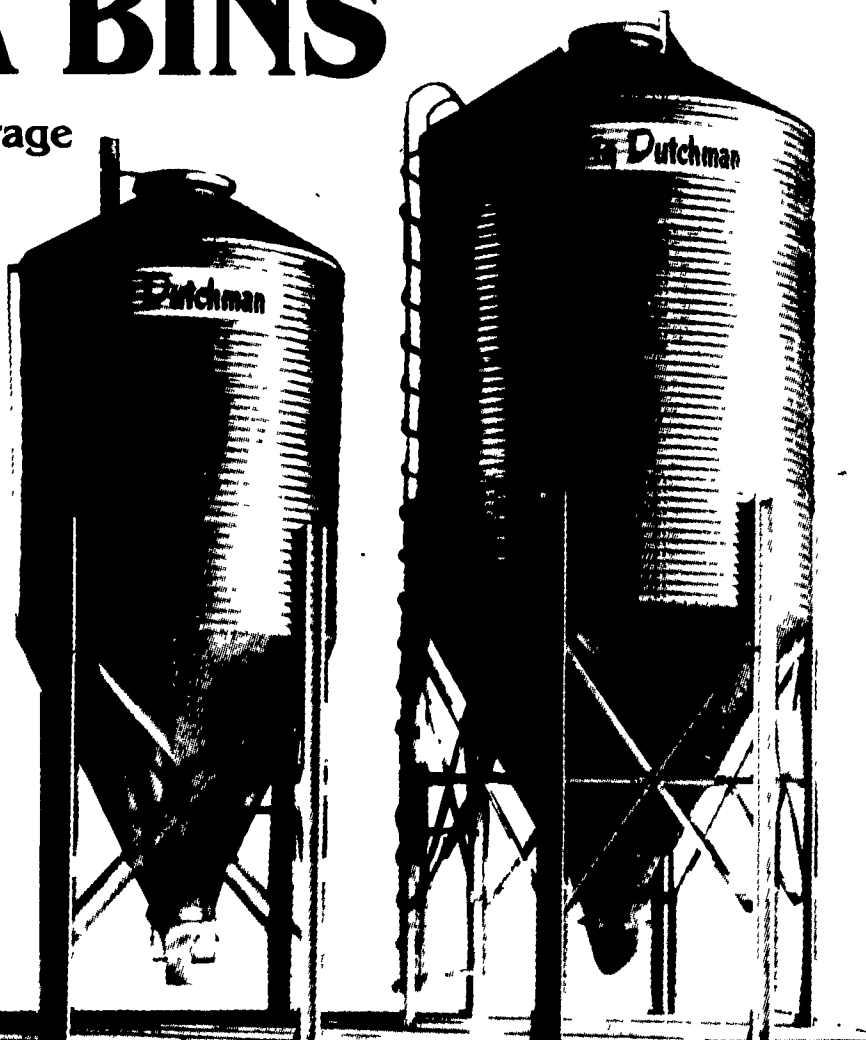
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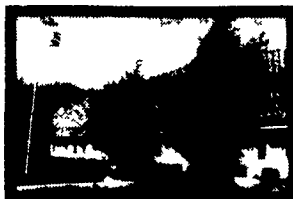
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