



THE SCOTSMAN

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EU warns of bird flu danger in chicken and eggs

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Key points

- EU warns against undercooked poultry but admits no evidence link
- EU bans import of live birds to prevent spread of avian flu
- Businesses accuse agency of scaremongering

Key quote

"[Cooking] protects from salmonella and other diseases. Avian flu is an added danger, even though there is no epidemiological data to prove it can be transmitted through food" -
European Food Safety Agency official

Story in full FOOD safety advisers are to warn the public to avoid raw eggs and undercooked poultry to prevent the spread of bird flu in Europe.

The [European Food Safety Agency \(EFSA\)](#) has said it "can't exclude" the possibility that the deadly virus can be transmitted through foods.

Raw eggs are used in various popular recipes including mayonnaise. No details were available last night over whether the advice would apply to partially-cooked foods such as soft-boiled eggs.

Until now, British food safety advisers have ruled out the possibility of humans contracting the disease through consumption of eggs or poultry.

The lethal H5N1 virus, which first surfaced in Asia, is difficult to transmit from bird to human and egg producers in Scotland last night condemned EFSA for "scaremongering".

News of the warning comes as the EU announced yesterday it was banning the import of live birds into Europe for a month in a bid to halt the spread of the disease.

EFSA, which advises EU authorities but does not issue binding recommendations, is due to publish its report today. An official confirmed last night the recommendation would call on consumers to avoid raw eggs and poultry.

"[Cooking] protects from salmonella and other diseases. Avian flu is an added danger, even though there is no epidemiological data to prove it can be transmitted through food," he said.

EFSA deputy executive director Herman Koeter said: "We don't have any evidence that the virus can be transmitted through food. But we can't exclude it, either. If you don't eat raw eggs and always cook poultry thoroughly, there should be no problems."



Health experts say the highly pathogenic H5 and H7 forms of the virus are rendered inactive by high levels of heat and by acid pH levels.

In the Asian human cases, exposure to the virus is thought most likely to have occurred during slaughter, defeathering, butchering and preparation of poultry for cooking.

Previously, the UK's Food Standards Agency has insisted there is no risk of contracting bird flu through food.

A statement on the [FSA website](#) last night read: "On the basis of current scientific evidence, our advice is that avian flu does not pose a food safety risk for UK consumers".

The statement advises caution in handling raw poultry products to guard against other infections. It adds "for people, the risk of catching the disease comes from being in close contact with live poultry that have the disease, and not through eating poultry".

Last night, Scottish egg producers reacted with dismay to the EU warning.

Dennis Surgenor, secretary for the [Scottish Egg Producer Retailer Association](#), said the advice is of great concern for the egg industry and has sparked worries about a consumer panic.

"This is dreadful. I have no idea what the EU is doing. It is reminiscent of scare-tactics like the announcement about salmonella that 'a million people would die.' With past salmonella scares, who eats a raw egg or a raw chicken these days anyway?"

"As far as we know at this moment, bird flu can only be caught through faeces or respiratory infections. There is no danger through food products and this has been confirmed as recently as yesterday by the Food Standards Agency."

Hillary Cochran, an egg producer in East Lothian, said UK safety standards already warn against handling and consuming raw eggs.

"It sounds like the EU is at last catching up to the UK which already has much higher standards that, if followed, would protect against bird flu anyway."

Following a crunch meeting in Brussels, veterinary experts agreed to ban all commercial imports of exotic and domestic birds for one month.

The move comes after a parrot imported into Britain was diagnosed with the deadly H5N1 virus over the weekend. The incident has been linked to a pet shop in Little Warley, Essex. The owner, Brett Hammond, is a convicted fraudster who has long been a target of animal rights groups.

Web links

- [Dept of Health - pandemic flu](#)
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EmergencyPlanning/PandemicFlu/fs/en>
- [WHO - Bird Flu fact sheet](#)
http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004_01_15/en/

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