

Salmonella cases in humans: assessing current EU reduction targets

After several years of decline, salmonellosis cases in the EU have flattened out. EFSA scientists say that setting stricter targets for *Salmonella* in laying hens at farm level could help reduce cases of this origin by a half.

EU countries are currently required to reduce the proportion of laying flocks infected with certain types of *Salmonella* to 2%. EFSA experts estimate that if this target was reduced to 1% salmonellosis cases in humans transmitted via laying hens would drop by 50%.

A target of 1% is currently in place for breeding hens – at the beginning of the poultry production chain – for five types of *Salmonella* that are of human health significance. EFSA recommends maintaining the existing target for three of these types and replacing the other two with types that are more relevant for public health today.

In the opinion published today experts also assess the role played by housing systems for laying hens. As of 2012, for welfare reasons the housing of laying hens in battery cages is forbidden in the EU. Only “enriched” cages (more spacious than battery cages and that must have a nest and litter) and alternative housing in non-cage systems (barn, free-range and free-range organic) are allowed.

Experts conclude that the occurrence of *Salmonella* is lower in hens that are reared in alternative housing systems than in cage systems. However, the reasons cannot be fully explained due to a lack of scientific evidence.

Salmonella in the EU

Salmonellosis is the second most common foodborne disease after campylobacteriosis in the EU and *Salmonella* is an important cause of foodborne outbreaks. In 2017, [Member States reported 91,662 cases in humans](#).