

I was recently asked by someone who was planning to acquire some laying hens whether they needed to check the eggs for bloodspots. They were not planning to acquire a rooster, so there was no chance of the eggs being fertilised.

The prohibition on bloodspots originates in the Talmud (Chullin 64b) lest the spot is an embryo. This can only occur where the egg is fertilised. As far as we know, immaculate conception is not found in poultry.

“Bloodspots” in eggs occur for a number of reasons. It might be an indication of a fertilised egg – in which case the whole egg is prohibited. However bloodspots might have been caused by a tissue problem in the hen causing a bleed in egg production or it might be a protein blemish and is not blood at all.

Most commercial eggs today are farmed in hen-only environments so fertilisation is an impossibility. (There is more risk with Free Range eggs, where the environment might be less controlled).

When they are graded for retail, eggs pass through a “candling process” where a bright light is shone through them and eggs with internal blemishes are rejected for individual sale. These are sent for commercial processing – powdered eggs, mayonnaise, cakes, mixes etc. Occasionally an egg with a mark does slip through the candling. The reason white eggs see fewer bloodspots is that their shells are thinner and the candling is more accurate. It has nothing to do with white eggs having inherently fewer bloodspots than brown.

The Talmud and Shulchan Aruch (Yorag Deah 66) discuss the consequence of the location of the bloodspot. The problem is where it is in the yolk or where the yolk and the white are joined. The Rema notes that we lack expertise in checking and that it is preferable to reject all of any egg with a bloodspot, wherever it is found.

The Shulchan Aruch states that where the coop only has hens and no roosters, eggs can be presumed unfertilised (even if the hen tries to incubate it). Accordingly “bloodspots” can be ignored. Rashi and other Rishonim allow the eating of such “bloodspots”. The Shach concurs and says that such “bloodspots” can be eaten; though the Vilna Gaon rules that it is a rabbinic prohibition and the spot should be removed.

Tha Aruch HaShulchan upholds the custom of checking eggs where possible. If impossible, and where there is confidence that the egg is unfertilised, it would not need to be checked.

The Minchat Yitzchak rules that the spot should be removed even if we know it is not from a fertilised egg. Rav Moshe cited as a personal chumra that if he found a spot in cooked eggs he would not use the pan for 24 hours – though this went beyond the letter of the law. Strictly speaking, Rav Moshe ruled that if a spot was found it should be removed. Moreover, given that eggs were cheap, it was preferable to throw out the egg. (Iggerot Moshe Yore Deah 1:36)

The Shulchan Aruch rules that eggs should be cooked in odd numbers with a minimum of three so that a potential bloodspot egg would be *bottul berov* (ie lost and permitted in the majority). Rav Belsky z”l of the OU considered that this stringency was no longer necessary.

Where cooking eggs on a catering basis eg schools and hospitals one can rely on the presumption that they are not fertilised and does not need to check them individually.

Despite all the above, I’m still checking all my eggs in a glass, rejecting the occasional one with a mark in it and cooking them in odd numbers starting with three. Despite all sorts of domestic kashrut inconsistencies in my childhood, I was brought up that way.

Nonetheless it would appear that my egg farming questioner is fully entitled to hold by the halacha as stated. It would be wrong to suggest that anyone conducting themselves accordingly was suspect in their kashrut. Eggs which are known to be unfertilised do not require checking and that while it is preferable, it is inessential to reject marked eggs or to excise the part with the spot.