



Food Safety for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Eating a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables is part of a healthy diet and can help lower your risk of many chronic diseases, including some types of cancer. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide recommends adults eat 7 to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables each day, depending on your age. For more information, visit Canada's Food Guide <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>.

Contaminated or dirty fresh fruits and vegetables may cause food-borne illness. Contamination can come from water, soil, fertilizer, wild animals or birds, unsanitary processing methods, and when food is handled or prepared by the consumer.

Who is at risk for food-borne illness?

Everyone is at risk of food-borne illness from contaminated or dirty food, but some people are at higher risk. These people include:

- seniors;
- people with AIDS, cancer, kidney disease, and certain other chronic diseases;
- people with autoimmune disorders, such as lupus;
- those who have had surgery to remove the spleen;
- those being treated with immune-suppressing medications;
- children under 5 years of age;
- pregnant women and their unborn or newborn babies; and
- those with a history of problematic use of alcohol or drugs.

If you belong to a high-risk group of people, it is safest to eat fruits and vegetables that are

cooked, especially if they have been grown in or on the ground. Follow the steps below to lower your risk of getting sick.

What are some tips to prepare fruits and vegetables safely?

There are several ways you can take to help prevent food-borne illness when eating fresh fruits and vegetables.

- Shop for fruits and vegetables at stores and markets that keep them apart from raw foods such as meat, poultry and seafood. There may be germs in the juices of raw food that can make you sick.
- Avoid buying fruits and vegetables that are bruised or damaged.
- Store fruits and vegetables away from fresh or frozen raw foods such as meat, poultry and seafood. Always pack fresh and raw foods separately in your grocery bags.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm running water before you begin preparing any food, including fruits and vegetables. For more information on hand washing, see [HealthLinkBC File #85 Hand Washing: Help Stop the Spread of Germs](#).
- Clean fruits and vegetables well before eating. Dirty produce can cause illness.
 - Use clean, running water when washing your fruits and vegetables.
 - Wash fruits and vegetables that have a rind, before peeling or preparing them. Germs on the rind may travel inside the fruit during cutting or peeling. Foods with a rind include pineapples, cantaloupes, oranges, melons and squash.

- Wash and scrub fruits and vegetables that have firm, rough surfaces such as potatoes. Use a clean scrub brush for produce.
- Cut away any damaged or bruised areas since harmful germs can grow there.
- Throw away rotten fruits and vegetables.
- Discard the outer, damaged or wilted leaves of leafy vegetables grown in or near the ground, such as lettuce and cabbage. The outer leaves are more likely to have germs.

Use separate cutting boards for fresh produce and for raw foods such as meat, poultry and seafood. If you do not have 2 cutting boards, wash the cutting board you have with hot, soapy water after preparing any raw food. After rinsing the cutting board with water, sanitize it with a dilute bleach solution (200 ppm no rinse sanitizing solution).

How to make a 200 ppm no rinse sanitizing solution:

- Mix 15 mL (1 tablespoon) of household bleach into 4 litres (1 gallon) of water; or mix 5 mL (1 teaspoon) of household bleach into 1 litre (4 cups) of water.
- Allow the sanitizer to contact the surface or utensil for at least 1 minute before wiping off with a clean paper towel or allowing to air dry.

Use Public Health Ontario's chlorine dilution calculator tool to make up the proper sanitizer strength based on the concentration of your bleach product
www.publichealthontario.ca/en/health-topics/environmental-occupational-health/water-quality/chlorine-dilution-calculator

- Put fresh fruits and vegetables into the refrigerator after peeling, cutting or cooking. Discard them if left at room temperature for 2 or more hours.

- Raw sprouted seed products, such as bean sprouts, radish sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, mung beans and others, can carry germs that may make you sick. It is best to cook sprouts before eating them.

For More Information

For more information about food safety, see the following:

- [HealthLinkBC File #59a Food Safety: Easy Ways to Make Food Safer](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #59c Food Safety: Instructions on Food Labels](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #76 Foods to Avoid for People at Higher Risk of Food-borne Illness](#)
- Healthy Canadians – Food safety
www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/topics/food-safety.html

To learn about food labelling, visit the following websites:

- Healthy Canadians – Food labels
www.canada.ca/en/services/health/food-labels.html
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency – Date Labelling on Pre-packaged Foods
www.inspection.gc.ca/food/information-for-consumers/fact-sheets-and-infographics/date-labelling/eng/1332357469487/1332357545633