

Wash your produce before you eat it

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For many of us, the arrival summer also means the arrival of fresh produce. Recent news reports of tomatoes being contaminated with the bacteria *Salmonella Saintpaul* and the 2006 contamination of spinach with the bacteria *E. coli O157: H7* has caused many of us to worry about the safety of our fruits and vegetables.

Fresh produce may become contaminated at any point during its farm to table journey. It's important that everyone who handles fresh produce from processors, storage, and transport workers to consumers themselves follow proper hand washing and other safety measures to avoid contaminating the fresh produce.

To increase the safety of your fruits and vegetables follow these guidelines:

- Do not buy bruised or damaged fruits or vegetables. Bacteria can thrive in the bruised areas.
- Dirt and bacteria can be deposited from our hands onto fresh fruits and vegetables and vice versa, so be sure to wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Wash anything that is going to touch fresh fruits and vegetables with hot water and soap, including cutting boards, counter tops, peelers and knives.
- Before eating, wash fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water. Those with rinds and skins that are not eaten should be rubbed or washed with a produce brush under running tap water.
- It is **not** necessary to wash prepackaged fruits and vegetables that are labeled “**ready-to-eat**”, “**washed**” or “**triple washed.**”
- Do not wash fresh fruits and vegetables with bleach or detergents. These products are not meant to be eaten.
- In your grocery cart and bag keep fresh fruits and vegetables separate from household chemicals and raw foods such as meat, poultry and seafood.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables that have touched raw meat, poultry, seafood or their juices should be cooked or thrown away.
- Refrigerate fresh fruits and vegetables within two hours of cutting, peeling, or cooking.

Following these safety measures will reduce the risk of contamination to fresh produce.

Reviewed by: Lou Ann Jopp and Suzanne Driessen, Extension Educators, Food Science, July 24, 2008