



Foodborne Illness: It's Not Just about Meat, Poultry and Seafood

By Linda Golodner

Fresh fruits and vegetables are the stuff of healthy diets, so it may surprise you to know that fresh produce can be implicated in foodborne illness. *Salmonella*, *Listeria* and other foodborne pathogens can contaminate your salad ingredients just as they can contaminate meats, poultry and seafood.

Recently, imported cucumbers from Mexico were reported to be responsible for 671 cases of *Salmonella Poona* infection in 34 states, according to the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC). As of September 29, CDC reports 131 people have been hospitalized, and there have been three deaths linked to the outbreak. Bottom line: Good food safety practices include an awareness of the risks of foodborne illnesses from fresh fruits and vegetables. Recall information and advice to consumers, restaurants and retailers are available on this [CDC webpage](#).



The following tips are based on the CDC "[Test Your Produce Safety Savvy](#)":

- Wash your hands for 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song" twice) with warm water and soap before and after preparing fresh produce.
- At the grocery store, be sure your fruits and vegetables are separated from raw meat, poultry or seafood in your cart and bagged separately at the checkout.
- Choose produce that is not bruised or damaged, especially if you are not planning to cook it.
- Store precut fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator or surrounded by ice in a cooler (for picnics, for example).
- Even though the package indicates that produce is pre-washed, add an extra layer of caution and wash it before eating.
- Keep fruits and vegetables separated from raw meat, poultry and seafood in the fridge. If fresh produce that will

Which Foods Make Us Sick?

CDC scientists used data from over 4,500 US foodborne illness outbreaks between 1998 and 2008 to find out which types of foods are most responsible for food poisoning.

The researchers categorized each outbreak into 17 food categories. Produce (fruits, nuts and vegetables) accounted for 46 percent of all illnesses. Meat and poultry accounted for 22 percent of all the illnesses.

The researchers point out that there are many outbreaks involving fresh produce because we eat so much fresh produce. Fresh produce has many health benefits, and CDC does not recommend curtailing our produce intake.

Learn more about the study [here](#).

- not be cooked contacts raw meat, poultry or seafood, throw out the fresh produce.
- Remove visible dirt and wash fruits and vegetables, even the ones you peel, under running water just before eating, cutting or cooking.
 - Do not use the same cutting board for fresh produce that you use for raw meat, poultry or seafood. To sanitize cutting boards and other food-contact surfaces, first clean with detergent and water and then sanitize with a solution of 1 tablespoon of regular chlorine bleach in one gallon of water (or 2 teaspoons of concentrated bleach in one gallon of water). Let air-dry.
 - Do not eat recalled produce. If you are unsure of the safety of your produce, ask the place of purchase or your supplier for information.
 - When in doubt about the safety of produce, if you cannot get more information, do not eat, sell or serve it to anyone, and throw it out.

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