



Preventing foodborne illness

As this year's *Salmonella* outbreak has shown, fresh produce is not immune to carrying dangerous foodborne illnesses. Young children, as well as pregnant women and their fetuses, are among the groups at particular risk for a fatal foodborne illness infection. The Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the US Department of Agriculture, and other national health organizations have specific recommendations for parents to follow that can minimize the risk of infection at the grocery store, in the kitchen, and on the dining room table.

Choosing the right produce

- Avoid purchasing bruised or damaged produce
- Buy only freshly cut produce—such as half watermelons and bagged mixed salad greens—that is refrigerated or surrounded by ice

Transporting and storing produce

- Put fresh fruits and vegetables in a separate bag—especially to separate them from meat, poultry, and seafood
- If transporting produce to outdoor locations, such as a picnic, place food items in a cooler with ice or with ice gel packs
- Fresh, perishable produce that needs refrigeration, as well as pre-cut and peeled produce, should be put away promptly at 40 °F or below to maintain both quality and safety (bacteria multiply rapidly between 40 °F and 140 °F)
- In addition, freezer temperature should be set at 0 °F
- Do not pack the refrigerator—cool air must circulate to keep food safe
- Fruits and vegetables should also be stored in the refrigerator or freezer separate from other foods
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours of cooking

Preparing produce

- Wash hands for 20 seconds with warm soapy water before and after preparing produce
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops with hot soapy water between preparation of produce eaten raw and other foods, such as meat, poultry, and seafood, to avoid cross-contamination
- Alternately, sanitize kitchen devices and utensils with diluted bleach—1 teaspoon of bleach with 1 quart of hot water
- Fruits and vegetables eaten raw should also be separated from other foods to avoid cross-contamination
- Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on produce
- Wash underneath running water, even if produce will be peeled (the use of soap or detergents is not recommended for food), and dry with a clean cloth or paper towel
- Firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, should be scrubbed with a clean produce brush
- Produce that is cut or peeled and left at room temperature for more than two hours should be discarded
- Wash sponges and dish towels weekly in hot water in the washing machine